Political Action in Compressing Space: A Study of Political Activist Groups in Hong Kong (revised version)

by

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A Thesis submitted to the Graduate School of the Chinese University of Hong Kong in Partial Fullfilment of the Requirement for the Degree of Master of Philosophy in Sociology Division, Aug. 1986

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Many people have contributed to the completion of this thesis. First of all, I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to Dr. Lau Siu-Kai, my supervisor, who continues to be an important source of inspiration, and has provided invaluable comments and criticisms to my work. I would like to thank also Professor Ambrose King for his very helpful advice and insightful comments. And I must express my gratitude to Dr. Kuan Hsin-Chi and Dr. Lau Chong-Chor members of my supervisory committee, who read patiently my manuscripts for me.

The research, however, would be impossible without the cordial support of my informants. Invariably, they provide with me not only factual information but also important insights into the situation. I would like to express my thanks specially to Mr.H.P.Chan and Mr.K.F.Yang who have assisted me in making the contacts and collecting the relevant documents.

Staff and graduate students of the Sociology Department of the Chinese University have hepled in various ways the completion of this work. I am especially grateful to

Sally Chun who has kindly typed the great majority of the manuscripts for me. Susanna Cheung and Simon Tam have also been helpful in typing and proof-reading. I must also thank Hsu Suet-Ming for her assistence in the printing out of the thesis.

Finally, I must mention my parents and sister who endure the course of writing this thesis with me, though in no words can I express my gratitude and affection towards them.

Abstract

This is a study of the political activist groups that have emerged in the early and mid 1980s in the context of the social-political system of Hong Kong. While the origin of the groups can be traced back to the political awakening of the educated youth of Hong Kong in late 60s, the profileration of the political groups was primarily conditioned by the Sino-Britisn negotiation on Hong Kong's future, with further stimulants provided by the introduction of local elections. The political groups in Hong Kong, it is found, are basically small primitive organisations formed by young educated middle class and they function primarily as social and political commentators. The most outstanding characteristics of these groups are their moderation and convergnce of stands in public which reflect their weak positions in the system. What have limited their space of manoeuvre are not only that they can affect changes in Hong Kong only in cooperation with the Chinese and Hong Kong authorities, but also their isolation as a result of the passivity of the Hong Kong public. This passivity, it is argued, reflects the conditions of Hong Kong as a dependent industrial capitalist colony on the soils of socialist China which do not favour the development of commitment but foster a deep sense of powerlessness on one hand, and reduce the need of collective solution of problems through political participation on the other hand.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Object and Aims of Study

This is a study of a relatively new phenomenon in Hong Kong --- so new that there is no standard term to characterise my object of study. 'Political activist group' is the best term that I come across, but its meaning is far from unambiguous, as one form or another of of political activities can be found among very different types of organisations in Hong Kong. My main interest, however, is on the 'newly emergent political forces' in Hong Kong, and I would define my focus of study as groups that are formed explicitly for the purpose of influencing government policies and future political changes, and are concerned primarily with central level political issues. In other words, my object of study are the 'political opinion groups'(論政團体), and 'political participation groups' (參政團体) that have mushroomed in Hong Kong in the early and mid 1980s. What are sometimes simply called political groups.

As new actors in the political arena that have managed to catch a quite considerable amoumt of public attention, the political activist groups are by themselves interesting

objects of study; but more importantly, they can be seen as a key to the understanding of the conditions and forces that have shaped and are shaping society and politics in Hong Kong. Therefore, in the present study, these groups would be related to the larger social structures in Hong Kong, and it is hoped that through a study of the development and activities of these groups, we can learn something about the wider social and political system in Hong Kong.

Approach

Analytically, there can be three possible perspectives in the study of these political activist groups. First, we can start with the individual actors, finding out the values, motivations, self-conception of the participants in these groups as well as how they define their situation and act accordingly. Secondly, we can start with the structural elements of society which define the distribution of power and resources and see how they shape the development and role of these political activist groups. Thirdly, we can trace the development of these groups and see how they are related to historical events and trends. In short, there can be an action, a structural, and a historical approach, which focus respectively on the subjective, objective, and developmental dimensions of these groups. In reality,

however, it is obvious that these three dimensions are related to each other and all the three approaches are indispensable for a sufficiently complex understanding of these groups. What would be attempted in the present study is, therefore, a combination of the three approaches, an approach that is especially necessary as this study attempts to achieve not only understanding of the groups and their operation but also the social and political processes they embedded in.

Sources of Information

Information for this study are collected from divergent sources. The first source of information are reports of interviews and events found in the press of Hong Kong. A second source of information are documents and publications of the political activist groups. A third source of information are reports on researches done by youth and student bodies in Hong Kong on these political groups. As a supplement to information thus collected, the author has interviewed twelve individuals from nine political groups. All of them have been active in the activities of the political groups, eight of them being founding members.The interviews are semi-structured, while I have in mind the items of information that I want to

collect, priority is given to smooth development of dialogue to facilitate communication.The questions can be divided into two categories: the first concerning the formation, organisation, membership characteristics, and mode of operation of the political groups; the second concerns the interviewees' evaluation of the situation and they are invited to comment on the social and political situation of Hong Kong and their own role in it. And the interviewees would sometimes provide also information on political groups they do not belong reflecting perhaps the small circle character of political activists in Hong Kong (1). Besides, I have also participated in forum and seminars organised by these groups to have a first-hand observation of their activities. There are also many informal occasions that I talk with people I know about these political groups. While I am not a member in any one of the groups, it should be noted, I am socially close to those participate in their activities, both in a sociological and a personal sense. Some of my knowledge about these groups is, therefore, personal in nature. While the methodology of this study is not well-controlled, and the danger of biasing effect of personal sympathies is always present, the study is based on a kind of understanding carefully controlled studies cannot often obtain. Hong Kong is in fact a small place where people cluster together and this is what give the present

study a certain community-study like character.

Analytical Framework

In chapter 2, a basic picture of the social-political system of Hong Kong and the underlying historical and external conditions would be presented and possible structural origins of the political groups located. Chapter 3 would be a historical account of the origin and development of the groups in the background of social and political changes in Hong Kong since mid 1960s. Chapter 4 provides an overview of the social bases, organisation, ideology, and activities of the political groups as well as the activists' subjective orientations. Case-studies of six groups would be presented in chapter 5 to provide a deeper understanding of the ideology, organisation, and development of the groups. Chapter 6 would present arguments on what have limited the development of the groups. A summary of what has been discovered in the study and some projections into the future would be provided in the concluding chapter.

LImits of the Study

Social scientific researches on Hong Kong politics are still in an early stage of development. While existing

studies are helpful in exposing the systemic qualities of the social and political structure of Hong Kong, there have been few studies on political changes in Hong Kong after ther late 60s with social movement and historical perspectives. The present study, therefore, has to be preliminary and exploratory in nature. Moreover, while the account of political groups presented in the later chapters would appear quite comprehensive, I would not pretend to know everything about the groups. Some of the information I used, in fact, is just filtered hearsay, and the descriptions may appear from time to time impressionistic. The purpose is, in this preliminary stage, to provide a general picture and some tentative arguments, with the help of which, more in-depth, carefully controlled investigations can be made.

Note

(1)I rely mainly on the classified newspaper clippings available in the Center for Hong Kong Studies and Students' Union of the Chinese University of Hong Kong for press reports. The periodicals I have consulted for information include Focus, Hong Kong Economic Journal Monthly, Mirror, Pai-Shing, and Wide-Angle. I have available two research reports, one by the Social Affairs Committee of Hong Kong Federation of Students, one by the 'Youth and Society Project' of Lai Tak Youth Centre, both containing records of of interviews with leaders of the political groups conducted in 1985. My own interviews were conducted in a period between February and May in 1986. The nine groups whose members (in one case, ex-member) I have interviewed are Association for Democracy and and People's Livilihood,

Association for Democracy and Public Justice, Hong Kong Affairs Society, Hong Kong Observers, Hong Kong People's Association, Meeting Point, New Hong Kong Society, Progressive Hong Kong Society, and Society for social Research. If we take members in the 'Joint Conference of Political Groups on Basic Law' as the population, then I have interviewed 9 out of 17 groups and should have included the more developed and dynamic groups, while information about others are availabe from other sources. These 17 groups, however, include Civic Association and Reform Club, which were formed in the early 50s, as well as Society for Community Organisation which functions primarily as organiser of community movements, outside the scope of attention of the present study.

CHAPTER 2

Hong Kong Society and Politics: a Structural Sketch

Essential features of the social-political system of Hong Kong would be outlined in this chapter through a review of existing literature. The purpose is to locate the possible structural origins of the political activist groups as well as to give a picture of the socio-political environment in which these groups must manoeuvre.

Historical and External Conditions

The social and political structures of Hong Kong do not emerge out of a vacuum. Rather they should be taken as specific outcomes of the historical and external conditions that continuously shape Hong Kong society. An account of these conditions is therefore necessary for an adequate understanding of the bases and dynamics of the social-political system of Hong Kong and this would be attempted in this section.

Constitutionally, Hong Kong is a British colony with its political status based on three treaties signed between the British and the Manchu government of China --- one of which, that relates to an area now constitutes Hong Kong's rural hinterland as well as an important portion of its urban areas, provides for a leasehold that is due to expiry in 1997. As a port on the South Chinese coast, however, Hong Kong was acquired not for its own sake. Rather, it serves as a base for the furtherance of British strategic and economic interests in the Far East, especially that relate to China (See Endacott, 1964:20-38, for a description of British considerations in acquiring Hong Kong and the initial policies of the British government towards Hong Kong).

After the Second World War, with the withdrawal of the British Empire from the Far East and the rise of China as big Communist power, the continual survivalof Hong Kong as a British colony becomes dependent on the tacit acceptance of the Peking regime which, though deriving considerable benefits from Hong Kong's present status, has refused from the outset to recognise the three unequal treaties on which, in the British point of view, the legitimacy of the present administration of Hong Kong is based (For a discussion of China's position on Hong Kong and its implications, see

England & Rear, 1981: 15-17; Harris, 1978:8-10, 162-170; Miners, 1981:18-38).

Inevitably, this peculiar situation of Hong Kong has far-reaching consequences. Firstly, ever since the island of Hong Kong was ceded to the British in 1843, the colonial government sees its primary role as to provide an orderly framework for economic pursuits, limiting its scope of activities as far as possible, a task much simplified by the fact that Hong Kong is a city-state (England & Rear, 1981:5; Lau, 1982a: 40-44). Secondly, prior to 1949, except for a minority, the population of Hong Kong is transient in nature with continuous two-way flow between Hong Kong and China. It is only after the Communist takeover of China in 1949 that Hong Kong acquires a relatively stable population and post-war Hong Kong is, therefore, a 'new society' made up primarily of immigrants from various parts of China, a characteristic that cannot fail to leave deep imprints on social organisation and behaviour (Hambro, 1955:11-20; Lau, 1982a:67). Thirdly, there is always a cloud of uncertainty over the future of Hong Kong which is now basically a function of Chinese politics. And as later discussions would show, actively and passively, policies and politics of China have never ceased to be one of the most important influences in social and political changes in Hong Kong.

Britain's continued interest in, and China's toleration of Hong Kong, however, depend ultimately on another condition: Hong Kong's ability to generate wealth. A more fundamental set of conditions circumscribing social and political changes in Hong Kong, therefore, flows from Hong Kong's particular mode of economic development.

Hong Kong was first developed as an entrepot. From the 1950s onward, however, Hong Kong turns towards manufacturing for exports which has become the mainstay of its economy and ushered in an age of sustained economic growth. The general rise in real incomes and expansion of opportunities for upward social mobility associated with economic growth in Hong Kong is definitely conducive to the widespread acceptance of the status quo, and the general perception that money is gained from outside rather than simply divided between the rich and the poor can serve as a further depressant to social and political conflicts. More still, Hong Kong's reliance on foreign capital and markets provides the government with ready arguments to justify its limited role in regulating the economy and redistributing income, and cushions it from radical criticisms (Lau, 1982a:173-174). To put it in a dramatic way, the economy is the most effective 'conservative' force in Hong Kong.

The socially stabilizing influence of the economy, however, is only one side of the story. An element of 'instability' is built in the system of a small, open economy like Hong Kong as everything depends so much on factors beyond the control of local actors. Hong Kong economy is known for its flexibility, but flexibility is not costless, and anyway, there are limits to flexibility (See Youngson, 1982:157-159 for a discussion of the dilemma of economic development in Hong Kong). 'Stability and prosperity' are now almost 'sacred' terms in Hong Kong, but that they are so frequently stressed reflects perhaps an awareness that the bases of that prosperity is very precarious (though people often have only the courage to admit the political threats), and the consequences of a prolonged economic downturn in Hong Kong, it is commonly believed, would be catastrophic.

In any society, political actors are never free in their choice of courses of action. They are always confronted by a pregiven set of circumstances and there are always variables that are not within their control. One point the above discussions in this section attempt to show, however, is that the space of manoeuvre for political actors in Hong Kong are particularly limited, especially for those that do not identify with the status quo, for Hong Kong is

not only a dependent economy, but also a 'dependent polity' (1).

Features of the Social-Political System and Corresponding Normative Orientations

Hong Kong, according to Lau (1982a), constitutes a 'minimally- integrated social-political system' in which a secluded bureaucracy is superimposed on an atomistic Chinese society composed of inward- looking and self-seeking familial groups.

The administrative brueaucracy, though still formally 'colonial', has been largely autonomous from directions from Britain (Kuan, 1979: 149-151) and it nearly monopolises political power in Hong Kong: it sets down the rules of the political game and carefully guards against the intrusion of other forces into the polity, the boundary of which is almost coterminous with the bureaucracy's own boundary. Concentrating public power in its own hands, the bureaucratic administration in Hong Kong, however, refrains from actively intervening in social and economic affairs --- a self-imposed limitation of role to avoid entanglement in conflicts (Lau, 1982a:26-29, 40-44).

As regards to politics and political activities

outside the bounds of the bureaucracy, the basic attitude of the bureaucratic administration in Hong Kong is one of suspicion and antagonism, a natural product of bureaucratic mentality and the structural positon of a colonial government. Seeing themselves as guardians of common interests in Hong Kong, the bureaucrats tend to see politics as a 'nuisance' that bring in unnecessary complications in their business of 'managing' Hong Kong. Moreover, it is afraid that political activities may threaten the hegemony of the bureaucracy, or may even bring in outside forces detrimental to political stability in Hong Kong. In fact, the policy to eradicate politics has been laid down since the early history of Hong Kong and general 'anti-political' or 'apolitical' or%+station of the Hong Kong public should be regarded as partly a product of this policy (Lau, 1982a:36-37). Exemplary of the bureaucracy's attitude towards politics is the view expressed by Sir Alexander Grantham, the Governor of Hong Kong from 1947 to 1958, in a speech to the Legislative Council on March 8, 1950:

> "We cannot permit Hong Kong to be the battleground for contending political parties or ideologies. We are just simple traders who want to get on well our daily round and common task. This may not be very noble, but at any rate it does not disturb others." (Hong Kong Hansard, 1950:41, quoted in Lau, 1982a:36)

Complementary to the bureaucracy's self-imposed limitation of role is the Chinese society's desire to be left alone, or for the sake of symmetry, 'self-imposed demobilisation' (2). Viewing Hong Kong primarily as a refuge for political upheavals or a marketplace for economic gains, the Chinese people in Hong Kong have minimum identification with the society they live in and treat it essentially as an instrument for the pursuit of familial and individual interests, which, in the context of Hong Kong, are primarily material. Moreover, having come to Hong Kong voluntarily to subject themselves to colonial rule, the predominant majority of Hong Kong Chinese have little taste for anti-colonialism (indeed, any political ideology), especially when it means the extension of Peking's rule to Hong Kong. Therefore, provided that their mundane needs are reasonably satisfied, it can be expected that the people of Hong Kong would have little inclination to impinge on the political arena (Lau, 1982a:68-69, 74-75, 87-88).

Further still, even if they have harboured discontents against the government, mobilisation of the Chinese people in Hong Kong would be extremely difficult. The first barrier is psychological. Pervasive among the people of Hong Kong is a sense of political powerlessness, and such an attitude would lead more easily to resignation than to

active political action in times of difficulties or crises (Lau, 1982a:105-109). The second barrier is organisational. As a result of avoidance of outsiders and low social participation on the part of Chinese familial groups in Hong Kong, intermediate organisations are sparse and weak in Hong Kong, and they therefore cannot serve as effective loci for mobilisation (Lau, 1981:867-874; 1982a:89-95, 130-148).

The general impression is that people in Hong Kong tend to associate politics with bad and terrible things, wars, chaos, faction strife, conspiracies, etc, and see political activities as something pursued by strange, self-seeking individuals. For those that have a more positive image of politics, they still tend to see it as something far removed from their daily life, which can be and should be kept out of. In fact, I suspect it is only recently that the people of Hong Kong become aware that there are politics, apart from public affairs, in Hong Kong, too.

The structural counterpart of the mutually reinforcing anti-political orientations of the bureaucratic administration and the Chinese populace in Hong Kong is a 'compartmentalisation of the polity and society' in Hong

Kong. And such a compartmentalisation (and therefore the corresponding normative orientations) maintained by two processes of 'depoliticisation'. On the top, we have 'administrative absorption of politics'; on the bottom, 'social accommodation' (Lau, 1982a).

The concept'administrative absorption of politics' refers to the process of elite-cooptation which forestalls the rise of counterelites and therefore eliminates potential threats to the authority of the government. A succint description of the process and its political significance has been provided by the original author:

> "Hong Kong's political stability in the last hundred years could be accounted for primarily by the successful process of the administrative absorption of politics. It is a process through which the British governing elites co-opt or assimilate the non-British socio-economic elites into the political-administrative decision-making bodies, thus attaining an elite integration on the one hand and a legitimacy of political authority on the other..... The ingenuity of the British governing elites lies in their sophisticated response in timely enlarging and modifying the structure of ruling bodies by coopting or assimilating emerging non-British socio-economic elites into "we" groups at critical periods. Consequently, the development of any strong counter-elite groups is prevented. In short, Hong Kong has been

> governed by an elite consensus or integration in the last century or so." (King, 1975:144-145) (3)

However, as Professor King (1975:145) has made it clear, elite integration could constitute a sufficient condition for legitimacy of government only in a society in which the political situation is rather small, and the political stratum can remain small in Hong Kong only because of a complementary process: the process of 'social accommodation of politics'. Quoting again from the original authors:

> "..... a complex, finely elaborated and highly differentiated organisational network at the basic level of society is able to garner enough resources to cater to the needs of the lower strata; consequently, these needs, already limited in scope by the capability of Chinese to tolerate need non-satisfaction, are thus restrained from being channelised into the political system for solution. Oftentimes this basic-level organisational network is primaryin nature, in that it consists of small groups of individuals who engage in exchange of resources and who are affectively attached to each other." (Lau & Ho, 1982:184)

Thus, we have now a basic picture of the social-political system of Hong Kong. In presenting this picture, I am largely repeating Dr. S.K. Lau's analysis of Hong Kong, which should be, however, regarded as the

culmination of social scientific researches on the social and political system of Hong Kong. Evaluations of Hong Kong differ, but few serious and objective analyst would dispute with the basic contention that, in Hong Kong, a politically apathetic society is ruled over by an all-powerful bureaucracy with the support of (but not necessarily dependent on) the socio-economic elites (For different shades of opinion, see Davies, 1977; Harris, 1978; Hong Kong Research Project, 1974; Rear, 1971). This model, in effect, constitutes the 'paradigm' for the study of Hong Kong politics in which every piece of evidence can fit together.

The problem for us is that, in this basic model of Hong Kong society, there is no place for our object of study --- the political activist groups. There are no social issues they can work on, no constituency from which they can draw support, and above all, there are no strata from which they would emerge (as all potential counter-elites are coopted) --- they can only be groups of idiosyncratic individuals isolated from the mainstream of life in Hong Kong society. But such interpretation would render the phenomenon that so many of them have emerged in one specific period of time and received so much public attention very puzzling. A preliminary attempt to tackle this problem

would be the task of the next section.

Structural Origins of Political Activist Groups: Ways Out of the Puzzle

Given the fact that the political conditions of Hong Kong depend very much upon factors external to the system, one plausible reason immediately available to explain the proliferation of the political activist groups would be that there are externally induced changes in the political situation which lead to the differentiation of the elites and politicization of the masses. This is in fact the most commonly held conception in Hong Kong.

Such a conception, however, tends to explain the rise of these groups in terms of 'chance' factors and lose sight of the endogenous processes of social and political changes. As Lau (1982a) has repeatedly emphasised, the features of the social-political system of Hong Kong should be regarded as outcomes of a specific structural- historical setting, not, say, the product of some transhistorical cultural traits of the Chinese, or essential characteristics of colonial government (4). Then, the social-political system of Hong Kong and the orientation fo the actors situated in it should not be something static, and immutable; rather, they should be in a continuous process of change, as things

evolve.

Firstly, if we see the tendency of the Hong Kong Chinese to avoid the polity as characteristic of immigrants responding to the conditions of a 'temporary station' ruled by an alien authority following unintelligible codes of conduct, we can expect the second generation of these immigrants, who are born, brought up, and educated in Hong Kong, would develop a different set of orientations to the social-political system of Hong Kong. For example, they may have a stronger identification with the system and feel more competent in demanding something from it. In fact, as early as 1967, as part of the reflections sparked off by the 1966 riot, a scholar has warned that a 'new generation' with potential political implications have emerged in Hong Kong (Jarvie, 1967:361-365).

Moreover, it has been noticed that, in the late 1970s, 'there is an emerging middle-income educated sector which is increasingly inclined to participate in public decision-making and which is beginning to be disillusioned with the responsiveness thus far displayed by the Hong Kong government' (Lau, 1982a:187). That would mean, there has developed in Hong Kong, a category of people which does not fall easily into the categories of elites and masses, and

are potential intruders into the political arena.

The potential political stratum, in fact, is not limited to the middle sector. When he wrote his paper 'Administrative Absorption of Politics' (1975), King has already argued that the masses would attai9 increasingly great political significance in a process of social mobilisation. In more concrete terms, Lau (1982a) observed that as a result of the enlargement of service-delivery role of the government and the Chinese society's incapacity to attend to the needs of the Chinese populace, there has emerged in Hong Kong a 'new politics' which 'entails an increase in the level of politicization, gradual formalization of the relationship between the bureaucracy and the Chinese society, progressive aggregation of political demands and growing salience of ideology in citizen political actions' (Lau, 1983: 556). And the "'compartmentalisation' of the polity and society is increasingly felt to be intolerable by the Chinese, and to a lesser extent, by the government, too" (Lau, 1982a:148). Creeping perhaps, there has been a process of politicization.

Therefore, it can be argued that both 'administrative absorption' and 'social accommodation of politics' are

approaching their limits in the 1980s, and the endogenous process of changes by itself should generate pressures for politics outside the bounds of the bureaucracy.

In the later chapters, we would see how these internally-generated changes are related to the characteristics and development of the political activist groups in Hong Kong, and whether these changes, together with the externally-induced conditions, can adequately account for the emergence of these groups.

Notes

(1) The term 'dependent polity' is used in the subtitle of Lau & Kuan (1985b).

(2) Hoadley(1971) in his thesis on Hong Kong politics points out one paradoxical phenomenon: whereas Hong Kong fits well with Almond & Poweell's model of 'pre-mobilised modern system' by virtue of the smallness of its political stratum, Hong Kong should be regarded as a 'mobilised system' with respect to indicators of mobilisation like literacy, urbanisation, percentage of wage-earners, and radio-ownership. Moreover, studies of Hong Kong's political culture reveal that there is an incongruence between the cognitive and attitudinal dimensions in Hong Kong Chinese's orientation toward political objects. One possible explanation is that Hong Kong Chinese are not 'premobilised' but 'demobilised', a self-imposed stance as a result of laxk of identification of the society, previous negative experience with politics, etc.

(3) A descriptive supplement to King's arguments is provided by Davies(1977), although he prefers to call the system 'class-dominated' rather than 'elite-consensual'.

(4) The social organisation and orientations towards the 'outsideworld' and political authority of the Italian immigrants living in Boston, for example, are very similar

to that of the Hong Kong Chinese, despite the cultural differences between Italians and Chinese (see Gans, 1962). It demonstrates that historical-structural factors should have priority over cultural factors in shaping socio-political orientations.

CHAPTER 3

Origin and Development of Political Activist Groups: A Historical Account

Whereas the approach of the previous chapter is structural, understanding the society and politics of Hong Kong in terms of the interrelationship among different elements, the approach of this chapter would be historical, and an account of the events, i.e. the interplay of structure and human action, that have given rise to and shaped the development of the political activist groups would be provided (1). Three interrelated processes are seen as having contributed to the development of the political activist groups: emergence of social movements and pressure group politics in Hong Kong, political reforms of the Hong Kong government, and the Sino-British negotiation on Hong Kong's future; and their specific effects would be analysed in chronological order in later sections.

Emergence of Internal Politics: 1967-82

The 1967 riot, an extension of the Cultural Revolution in China to Hong Kong, is the last event before the Sino-British negotiation on Hong Kong' future that indicated unambiguously how much the political scene of Hong

Kong can be affected by politics in China. The withhold of support to the local Communists on the part of Peking, however, signified the Chinese government's pragmatic approach to Hong Kong, even amidst franatic ideological fervor, and its tacit endorsement of the status quo of Hong Kong. And the withdrawal of Peking to the backstage of Hong Kong politics and the restraint of its agents in Hong Kong in the 1970s provided a 'space' for the emergence of 'local' or 'internal' politics and development of non-partisan (with respect to Peking and Taipei) and non-governmental political forces in Hong Kong (Lo, 1986). Moreover, the Kowloon riot a year before showed to the bureaucratic administration of Hong Kong how frustrations building up on the bottom of the society can threaten the stability of the system, and in the later decade, we see the government gradually modify its approach to the society --- more services are provided, and more attention paid to its relationship with the public at large, not just the elites (King, 1975; Kuan, 1979). Thus, 1967 can be regarded as the first 'great divide' in the post-war political development of Hong Kong.

Behind the spectacular events of 1966 and 1967 was, however, a more invisible trend of demographic changes. In the late 1960s, first group of the post-war-born generation matured into young adulthood. Born and brought up in Hong

Kong, these young people have stronger identificationwith the society and the gradual improvement of life led to rising expectations --- they began to demand more from the system (Yeung, 1983). The lower class youth struck out in the riot of 1966 (to a lesser extent, 1967, too); their more well-educated and more privileged counterparts showed their presence in the student movement.

Student Movement

Signs of increasing social awareness are, in fact, discernible among the educated young people in the early 1960s. The Post-Secondary Students' Social Service Team (大專學生社會服務隊) was founded in 1963 and the Hong Kong University Students' Union established a Current Affairs Committee under its Council in 1964. There was, moreover, a proliferation of literary clubs (文社) among the secondary school students, which reflected on one hand a certain dissatisfaction with the dominant mode of life in Hong Kong, a life that knew only familistic and material values, and heightened on the other hand the social and national consciousness of their participants (2). The literary clubs gradually disappeared in the late 1960s. Some of their members, however, entered into universtiy and became active in the student organisations. And as we would see later, in the 1980s, they reappeared as organisers of a

poltical activist group.

The height of the student movement in Hong Kong was in the early 1970s. The students campaigned for the recognition of Chinese as an official language, the protection of the disputed Chinese territories of Tiao-Yu-Toi Islands, and on behalf of the underprivileged, notably the blind workers, and the squatter-dwellers. The movement, however, soon 'internalised' into disputes among the students over the anti- corruption campaign in 1973, an almost inevitable consequence of the contradictory status of Hong Kong.

Roughly speaking, three broad strains of orientations can be discerned among the student activists: the Maoist-nationalist, the neo-leftists, and the liberals. The Maoist-nationalists identified unquestioningly with Peking, and saw their main task as preparing Hong Kong for the eventual return to the Socialist motherland. Their attitude towards the status quo of Hong Kong was: it was an necessary though temporary evil. The neo-leftists were more Hong Kong-oriented and suspected whether Peking was really practising socialism. They advocated social action and direct protests against social injustices in Hong Kong. The liberals upheld the values of liberty, human rights, and

democracy. They were critical of Peking and mildly reformist towards Hong Kong.

There was a time sequence of development, too. Before the Protect Tiao-Yu-Toi Campaign, the dominant orientation of the student activists was liberal, and the Chinese nationalism they cherished was primarily cultural, not political. Partly as an reaction to the high- handed suppressin of the campaign by the colonial authority, the students, however, turned more and more radical, i.e. against the colonial society. In 1973, the differing orientations of the student activists crystallised into two facitons: the majority Maoist-nationalist 'Kuo-shui' faction (國粹 'Best of the Nation') and the action- and theory-oriented Neo-leftist 'She-hui'(社會 'Society') minority. And in 1975, some liberals reemerged in the scene, with the support of anti-Kuo-shui students, the real majority. After 1977, with the collapse of the dominant Kuo-shui faction, however, these ideological distinctions lost practical significance, and on the whole, the student activists became more and more Hong Kong-oriented, pragmatic, and disposed to striving for concrete, piece-meal improvements, and, in effect, the student organisations merged into the developing pressure-group politics in Hong Kong(3).

These different ideological orientations and their succession are worth noting for they were reflected in the different orientations of the political activists, our focus of study. Moreover, the emergence and decline of these orientations reflected the dilemmas faced by any movement not satisfied with seeking piece-meal changes of mundane conditions in Hong Kong. A student activist made such a summary of the dilemmas before them in 1973:

> To love China, and continue the spirit of the student movement developed since May Fourth --- but where lie our roots? To oppose the colonial government, and eliminate oppression and exploitation --- but what is our direction? Patriotism and to learn about China, anti-colonialism and social reforms --- what should we do about them? (Far Eastern Affairs Commentators, 1982: 218-219)

These problems were disturbing because the status quo of this corrupt colony of Hong Kong was endorsed by the Socialist China they wished to know and love, but were segregated from and understood so little. The solution of the Kuo-shui faction was to follow closely the policies of the Peking regime and wait patiently for the coming of the 'ideal society'. But the appeal of such an option rapidly evaporated with the exposure of the dark sides of China after 1976. Students of She-hui orientation advocated action against the injustices of Hong Kong society, but they

could not solve the problem as to what should 'anti-colonialism' in Hong Kong lead to if they would not accept a simple merge with China, not to say that their critiques of colonialism and neo-capitalism were scarcely understood by the people of Hong Kong. As for the liberals, their values were too close to the dominant institutions and the great majority of them were therefore easily absorbed by the society.

From the outset, the student movement of Hong Kong is a 'movement in search of a direction', and have had, after 1973, limited impact on the wider society. It has, however, served to stimulate young Hong Kong intellectuals' reflections on their own social situation, and led to the institutionalization of an 'idealistic subculture' around the student organisations of the Post-secondary educational instituions, heightening therefore the social and political consciousness of a segment of the educated, middle class in Hong Kong. Three former student activists, for example, have such a conclusion on the impact of the student movement on their own development:

> Perhaps, the practice of the student movement in the 70s has not solved any theoretical problem for us. But that as young intellectuals we can no longer stay in the small circles of the individual is a precious lesson we learn with blood, sweat, and

inestimable amount of energy. (4)

Some of these student activists later became organisers of 'pressure groups' and we can detect the shadow of the student movement among the political activist groups that emerged in the early 1980s.

Pressure Group Politics

The term 'pressure group' has a special meaning in Hong Kong. It refers to groups which are in different degrees opposed to the government and rely primarily on publicity campaign to seek their desired changes in government decisions. Four different types of them can be identified: a) unions of public-service workers and semi-professionals, b) community organisations, c) advocacy groups on educational reforms, labour welfare,etc and d) opinion groups on general issues (Yeung, 1985b).

Usually founded in the early and mid 70s, these groups gained increasing prominence in the latter half of the 70s, and they constituted the backbone of the then developing 'Struggle For Entitled Right Movements' (爭取權益運動). Their emergence reflected on one hand the general growth of secondary, associational groups in Hong Kong (Lee, 1982:51-55), and on the other hand, the

increasing importance of government's action in the everyday life of the citizens.

With the exception of the Hong Kong Observers which can be taken as the predecessor of the political activist groups emerged in the 80s, these pressure groups tend to concentrate on narrow, particular, and concrete issues, and deliberately maintain a low political tone. In the late 1970s, however, they gradually elevated their level of concern from isolated issues to general policy, and in the early 1980s, we began to hear about demands for more popular participation in various areas of public policies, notably housing and education. A milestone of the development of the pressure groups was the Campaign Against Increase in Bus-Fare in 1981. In this incident, the pressure groups joined together on one general issue, and there emerged a scenerio of a united front of political forces that stand for middle and lower class interests in Hong Kong, a scenerio seemed increasingly likely with the further cooperation of the pressure groups in the Campaign Against Increase in Electricity Charges and the 'Joint Committee for the Supervision of the Public Utilities' (各界監管公共事業聯委會), though a recognized leadership and a permanant nucleus organization for joint action had not yet emerged. Themselves a product of the government

bureaucrats' more tolerant and conciliatory policies towards critics and protestants, these groups have helped to create a more tolerant political culture among the public as they are increasingly accustomed to open criticism of and challenges to the government authority (Lau & Kuan, 1985a). However, their political stand, even with reference to the internal social forces of Hong Kong, is quite ambiguous. Vaguely, they stand for the interests of the middle and lower classes, but that 'middle and lower classes' is not well-defined, not to say their interests.(5)

In a nutshell, in the early 1980s, in embryonic form, a local 'third political force' is emerging in Hong Kong, but before it can crystallise into any concrete form, the Sino-British negotiations on Hong Kong's future fundamentally altered the conditions of the political game.

Changes with far-reaching consequences were introduced, in fact, before the negotiation began. In 1982, District Boards with one-third of their members directly elected by all people over 21 in age and having lived in Hong Kong for more than 7 years were established in the 18 administrative districts of Hong Kong. These District Boards are primarily advisory bodies with very limited discretionary power, but the changes marked the introduction

of election by universal suffrage in Hong Kong. Originally presented as a measure to solve mundane problems, these 'administrative' reforms became the first step in the 'planned democratisation' of Hong Kong which was closely related to the issue of Hong Kong's constitutional future. And the District Boards later became the first points of entry of the political activist groups into the existing political institutions, and the elections events of widespread political mobilisation.

The Issue of Hong Kong's Future and the Rise of the Political Activist Groups in Hong Kong

Approaching late 1970s, the expiry of the leasehold of the New Territories in 1997 became an increasingly pressing problem for the British government and the business community of Hong Kong. And in 1982, the Chinese government consented to negotiate with the British on the constitutional future of Hong Kong. The Sino-British negotiations on Hong Kong's future marked the re-entry of China into the front stage of Hong Kong politics and ushered in a host of novel changes in the political scene of Hong Kong --- one of which is the proliferation of political activist groups.

While the emergence and development of the political

activist groups have been intimately related to the Sino-British negotiations on Hong Kong's future and connected developments, we should note, however, that the formation of some of these groups predated the emergence of 'Hong Kong's future' as the dominant political issue and they were initially oriented to other social issues. The Hong Kong Observers, a middle-class opinion group, which shared many characteristics of the political groups that emerged in the early 1980s, was formed in 1975 and acted primarily as a liberal social critic. The Society for Social Research was formed in 1981 to research on problems related to various public policies. The Meeting Point was first organised as a forum to discuss the 'youth problem' in Hong Kong in 1982, and the first activity of the Hong Kong Policy Viewer was to study the Urban Council Election in 1983.

Nonetheless, the political circumstances created by the Sino- British negotiations on Hong Kong's future and the settlements reached have been the primary stimulant to and shaping force of the development of the political groups.For heuristic purpose, I would divide in the following passages the development of the groups into several phases, and show how different phases of development of the political activist groups can be related to the development of the

political circumstances created by the negotiaiton on and arrangements for Hong Kong's future.

First Phase: Sudden Emergence of Space ---
Idealists responding to historical opportunity

The Sino-British negotiation began in an uneasy climate of confrontation in late 1982. Whereas the Chinese government insisted from the very beginning the sovereignty of Hong Kong belonged to China and must be resumed on or before 1997, the British wished to maintain, through one way or another, a continuing 'official British link' in Hong Kong after 1997. To strengthen their positions in the negotiation, both sides tried to enlist the support of the Hong Kong people, and a 'battle for public opinion' ensued. As both the Chinese and British (Hong Kong) governments would like to cultivate as much support as possible and China, while insisting on the resumption of sovereignty, apparently did not have a detailed blueprint for the future political arrangements of Hong Kong, a golden opportunity for a third political force oriented to changing the status quo of Hong Kong seemed to have been created.

The existing pressure groups, however, were not prepared to make use of the opportunity: firstly, they were primarily interest groups seeking piece-meal improvements of

the conditions of their members and supporters or groups concentrating on one policy area, and little idea on the overall future direction of Hong Kong; secondly, the issue of Hong Kong's constitutional future was too controversial and sensitive and would probably divide their supporters if the leaders declared a clear stand --- given the conflicting appeals of nationalism and pragmatism, as well as the pressure groups' critical stance towards the Hong Kong government, a non-controversial stand would virtually be impossible. The pressure groups, therefore, maintained silence throughout the disputes over the 'sovereignty problem'.

It were the intellectuals that came up for the challenges(6). First, it was not quite correct to say that all the pressure groups formed in the 70s had kept quiet on the issue of Hong Kong's future. Two middle-class opinion groups, Hong Kong Belongers and Hong Kong Observers, had voiced out their views in the early phase of the emergence of the issue as a public concern. While the Belongers were in favour of preserving as much of the status quo as possible, the Observers, younger and more liberal in orientation, asked for autonomy within China and a more open and representative government, foreshadowing what are to be demanded by the political activist groups later. There were

also groups formed specifically for the issue, notably the Hong Kong Prospect Institute (Cheng, 1984a: 116-120, 124-129).

It is, however, the 'Democratic Reformist' (民主改革派) groups that were to have a more significant role to play and worth our special attention here. The slogan of the 'democratic reformists' was 'Democratic Reforms and Return to China'. The return of Hong Kong's sovereignty to China, it was agrued , was not only required by nationalist principles, but was also 'an opportunity provided by history' for democratisation and socio- economic reforms in Hong Kong which, in turn, might stimulate the democratisation of China.

This strand of thought was first given publicity by some columists in the early 80s, but its origin can be traced back to the student movement of the 70s(7). An ex-student activist, a leading figure of the she-hui faction, articulated such a view in a speech in 1975:

> In Hong Kong, the goal of anti-colonialism should be reunification with China, and that of anti-capitalism should be to merge into the democratisation movement in China..... When the conditions of ideology and hold of real power are ripe, we

> should mobilize the masses, and initiate the slogan of 'reunification with China'. (Tsang, 1979:64).

Such a plea had to be a cry in the void in the 70s, and would be taken seriously only by a small group of radical intellectuals , idealists in an ideal-less society. As a result of the political circumstances created by the Sino-British negotiation on HOng Kong's future, in the early 80s, however, there seemed to be some chance of success for the partial realisation of their long frustrated youthful ideals --- a space suddenly emerged so that there was at least something for them to do. 'Hong Kong has gone into a dead alley, but now there can be a way out' --- a sympathetic but more pessimistic journalist thus described the reason for their excitement (Ng Mak-yin, H.K.Econ.J'l Monthly, Dec., 1982:16).

A systematic presentation of the views of the 'democratic reformists' was attempted in the 'Proposals for the Future of Hong Kong' announced by the Meeting Point when it was formally founded in January, 1983. Founded in approximately the same time was New Hong Kong Society, another body of democratic reformists. While supporting the resumption of sovereignty of Hong Kong by China, both groups asked for an elected government as well as social and

economic reforms --- a much watered-downed version of the original ideals of the she-hui faction. Their views are echoed by the activists of the students' unions of the two universities in Hong Kong, and in the hands of these young idealists, 'high degree of self-administration' (高度自治) and 'Hong Kong governed by Hong Kong People' (港人治港) promised by the Chinese leaders became 'Democratic self-administration' (民主自治) and 'Hong Kong governed by Hong Kong people democratically'. (港人民主治港) The term 'Min-zhu' (民主) meaning 'democracy' was inserted whenever it was possible. Thus, there emerged a third strand of political opinion in Hong Kong --- pro-China in principle, these activists pressed for something the Chinese leaders might not be so willing to grant.

As the British were in the upper hand in the battle for public support in Hong Kong, however, the Chinese leaders could not afford to alienate any section of public opinion that supported their position of resuming the sovereignty of Hong Kong, and adopting the classical Maoist strategy of 'united front', they tried to cultivate these groups of democratic reformists. Xu Jia-tun, Director of New China News Agency, official representative of Peking in Hong Kong, for example, appeared in the first anniversary

ceremony of the Meeting Point, and in his first public speech on Hong Kong's future in Hong Kong, Xu praised the patriotism of the young intellectuals in Hong Kong , promised a significant role for the intellectuals in the future 'Hong Kong Governed by Hong Kong People', and urged them to come forward to support the cause of reunification with China (H.K.Econ. J'l Monthly Feb., 1884).

Never had been a time in Hong Kong's history that intellectuals appeared so important and in 1983 and 1984, we saw many small groups formed among the young college graduates and students to study various social and political issues. Not all of them got formally registered: some were nothing more than small discussion groups and some disappeared after presenting an article in the press.

Standing out among these groups was the Hong Kong Affairs Society formed in February, 1984 which was composed of older and more established professionals. Whereas the early groups were formed mainly by peripheral intellectuals and young graduates in an early stage of their personal careers(8), people in a certain sense not fully participating in the society, the appearance of the Hong Kong Affairs Society marked the entry of the upper-middle class in the political scene.

Seocnd Phase: Decolonisation began ---

From Opinion to Electoral Groups

Information that the British has yielded to Peking's position on the 'sovereignty' issue and that the Hong Kong government was considering opening the Legislative Council to elections circulated widely in early 1984. And political commentators were quick to note that decolonisation involving the development of representative government had begun in Hong Kong and could be dated back to the introduction of district boards with directly elected members in 1980. The remaining doubts were cast out by the announcementof Howe, the British Foreign Minister, in Hong Kong after his visit to Peking, who declared it unrealistic to wish for the continuation of British administration in Hong Kong after 1997 and that the Hong Kong government would develop towards the direction of a more representative system.

That there would be a process of democratisation planned from above was thus clear to all. From then on what poliitical reforms should be introduced to Hong Kong replaced the 'sovereignty problem' as the dominant political issue in Hong Kong and the political activist groups began considering to support candidates in the coming elections to the District Board and Urban Council. Organisation of new

groups aiming at elections started and the existing groups, notably the Meeting Point, took steps to strengthen their organisation. Preparation for the future 'Hong Kong governed by Hong Kong people' began earnestly.

In July 1984, two months before the draft Sino-British Joint- Delaration on Hong Kong's future was signed, the Hong Kong government issued a Green Paper on the development of representative government. In this proposal for political reforms, indirect elections to the Legislative Council through 'functional constituencies' made up of professional bodies, business organisations, etc, and electoral colleges formed by members of the District Boards are provided, but not direct elections (H.K. Govt., July, 1984).

In response to the Green Paper, 49 bodies, including the political activist groups and the pressure groups formed in 70s, formed into a 'Joint Conference for the Study of the Green Paper on Representative Government' (各界研討代議制綠皮書聯席會議), and they organised a mass rally in September 1984 in which a declaration demanding direct elections to not less than one-fifth of the seats in the Legislative Council signed by 89 bodies was presented. This marked the first attempt by the political activist

groups to collaborate with each other and other 'pressure groups' in Hong Kong.

The White Paper, the final decisions on political reforms issued in November 1984, had not provided for direct elections, but it was widely believed at that time that direct elections to the Legislative Council would be introduced in 1988. At about the same time people debated on the Green Paper, arguments in favour of a party that can coordinate and balance all interests in Hong Kong appeared and these were taken to be arguments for a 'dominant party system' following the model of Singapore.

The would-be 'dominant party', it was then believed, was the 'Hong Kong People's Association' founded in November 1984 by a group of established academics, professionals, and senior executives, people seen publicly as close to the bureaucratic administration ideologically and socially. The Hong Kong People's Association turned out to less ambitious than it was thought to be but its significance lay on being the first group formed by elites close to the core values and institutions of Hong Kong society a group whose main intent apparently was to preserve the virtues of, rather reform the injustices, of the existing system.

An event that can be seen as the culmination of the development in this phase and marked a significant advance of the political activist groups in participating in the political system --- an advance beyond the role of commentators --- was the District Board election in March 1985. In this 'warming-up race for governing Hong Kong', 6 of the political activist groups formed in the 80s had members running as candidates in the election and the success rate of these candidates was remarkably 100%, and the number of votes they obtained was also very impressive (Focus, Mar. 9, 1985:21). What triumphed here, however, were the young and educated, rather than the political activist groups. Predominant majority of the candidates ran as individuals rather than members of the groups and their membership in the political activist groups did not stand out in the election campaigns (25). While some groups had played a significant role in recruiting the volunteers and organising the election campaigns, the support provided by the political groups, in general, was not an important factor of success.

Nonetheless, the election served as a boost to the prestige of these political activist groups and the newly acquired status of district board members allowed members of these groups to build up ties with the local populace, the

grassroots.

Third Phase: Filling the Vacuum --- Race to Inherit Power

This phase began with the emergence of the Progressive Hong Kong Society, the first group that seemed to command the resources to become a ruling political party, and it was the period that we heard most about forming political parties in Hong Kong.

The formation of the Progressive Hong Kong Society was formally announced in March 1985, after the District Board Election was held. What set the group apart from other political organisations were first that its chairman, who almost personified the group, was an appointed unofficial member of both the Executive and Legislative Councils, who is also elected member of the Urban Council and therefore, ex-officio member of a district board --- the only person that has participated in all the four 'tiers' of the political institutions in Hong Kong. Secondly, perhaps more importantly, the group has, among its founders, members of 6 very rich families in Hong Kong and is known to be supported financially by these families.

Although the declared aim of the Progressive Hong

Kong Society was to build up a cross-class organisation which can coordinate the interests of different social strata and included among its founding memberM leaders of unions and 'pressure groups', it is widely seen as the first attempt of the elites of Hong Kong to organise themselves politically, in face ot the coming transition of power.

The foundation of the Progressive Hong Kong Society spurred other groups of people into action. Firstly, another appointed unofficial member of Legislative Council, Allen Lee, announced publicly an ambitious plan to form a 'political party', that would have a membership of twenty thousand and a definite platform, to take part in the coming direct elections to the Legislative Council. Collaborating closely with him was a number of younger unofficial members of the Legislative Council. And behind them, it was believed, were the more senior figures.

There thus occurred an interesting situation in which there were two elite political groups in latent competition: one still-born, but sounded ambitious and aggressive, the other, formally founded, got no definite stand on any issue, consistently denied even the ambition to become a political party, but concentrated on aggrandizing

its organisation silently.

Another group of people that responded to the challenge of the Progressive Hong Kong Society were leaders of the 'pressure groups'. A group of 'pressure group' leaders, social workers and other individuals, most of them church-related, had come together and considered the formation of a political group in as early as 1984. Seeing what they sensed as a process of political organisation from above, they hastened to form the Association for Democracy and Public Justice on July, 1985 which championed explicitly the interests of the lower classes, ostensibly as a countervailing power to the elite groups.

And in as early as late 1984, three small political groups the Hong Kong Policy Viewer, New Hong Kong Society, and Society for Social Research, and a neighbourhood organisation organised around Urban Councillors and district board members with 'pressure group' background, Sham-Shui-Po People's Livelihood Concern Group began to discuss on the possibility of collaborating their forces to form a larger organisation. They were later joined by the Association for Democracy and Public Justice, other political groups of reformist orientations, and several 'offices' of distric board members, and in around mid-1985, we began to hear

about the formation of a 'grassroots party'.

Formation of political parties was so much in vague in mid- and late-1985 that we heard even of the plan to form a pro-Peking political party.

Among those politically active, the general feeling was that an effective organisation was mandatory for anybody who would like to have a position in the political institution, or influence the political process.

If the number of press reports is a valid indicator, it was the time that political activist groups received the most public attention and this period can, in fact, be characterised as a climax of the development of the political activist groups in Hong Kong. But the continued development of these groups made sense only if there would be significant power to be inherited or shared in Hong Kong --- judging from the low-profile strategy of the Progressive Hong Kong Society, and the wait-and-see attitude of Allen Lee, the political activists were not quite sure about that even in this period of relative optimism.

Fourth Phase: Limits Exposed --- Withdrawal or Organisational Consolidation

This phase began roughly in late 1985 and continued till now. From July 1985 onwards, the Chinese leaders, directly and indirectly, disclosed their reservations towards political reforms in Hong Kong, and by late 1985, it was clear that Peking would not tolerate forces independent of its control to take over Hong Kong from the British --- to develop an 'inheritance party' would be a very impractical line of thought.

Under these circumstances, Allen Lee declared in January 1986 the abandonment of his plan to form a political party, the reason being that there would be no power to take for the party. The Progressive Hong Kong Society, on the other hand, showed no significant development one year after it was formed, and was quite inactive, at least in the public.

While the elites have given up the attempt to be the 'Hong Kong People' that 'govern Hong Kong', the more modest middle-class reformist groups which wish at most to occupy more positions the political institutions to enhance their influence and image rather than to inherit power move on. The Meeting Point is beginning to build up ties with

residents in different localities, the attempt to combine forces on the part of several small groups culminated in the formation of Association for Democracy and People's Livelihood, and the Hong Kong Affairs Society, has also shown signs of more active participation in the political scene. Without high hopes and acutely aware of the uncertainties ahead, these groups prepare themselves quietly for the changes that may come.

Notes

(1) Two 'political groups', Reform Club and Civic Association, were formed in the early 50s. But they were known to be lacking dynamism and political significance (see Hoadley,1973; King, 1975). As the interest of the present study is on a historal phenomenon, the political groups profilerated in the 1980s, they would not be considered here.

(2) See the reports of interview with Chan Yuen-ying on Wide Angle, July 6, 1985 ,and Man Sai-Cheong on H.K. Economic Journal, Dec. 2, 1985 (in Chinese).

(3) See the collection of commentaries and original documents in Far Eastern Affairs Commentators(1982) and Hong Kong Federation of Students(1983).

(4) Quoted from Lo Chi-kin, Ma Fung-kwok, & Cheung Shui-lam, 'The Present, Past,and Futureof Student Movement',a paper presented in the Twenty-secondAnnual Meeting of the H.K. Federation of Students in 1981 (original Chinese).

(5) For information about 'pressure groups' and citizen movements see Cheng(1984a, 1984b), Lui(1984), Yeung(1983) and 'Special Issue on Pressure Groups', H.K. Economic Journal Monthly, July, 1981.

(6)'Intellectuals' in a loose sense refers to educated people. But the term implies also a special interest in reasoning and abstraction.

(7) For a collection of representative articles sharing the 'democratic reformist' stand, see Tsang et.al. (1982).

(8)'Peripheral intellectuals' refer to those intellectuals alienated from the core values of the society. See Lee (1984b).

CHAPTER 4

The Groups, The Activists, and The System: An Overview

Having outlined a basic picture of the socio-political system of Hong Kong, and traced the events that shaped the development of the political activist groups, I would attempt in this chapter to give a closer look at the groups, their participants, and how they see their own situation and behave in Hong Kong.

Social Bases

Members of political activist groups in Hong Kong are distinguished by their age and education. Although no systematic survey has been carried out, it is generally observed that a predominant majority of them are below forty in age and have received higher education. And consistent with their education. they are usually professionals and semi-professionals.

As a rule, these people have been active when they

were students, although not all of them have been strictly speaking particiapants in the student movement in Hong Kong. And almost invariably these groups were founded by people who have maintained ties in friendship networks formed in school days, giving many of the groups an old-boy association like character, and we can identify these groups with connections formed when they were students. To quote a few examples: the members of the first session of the Hong Kong People's Association predominantly graduated from the University of Hong Kong in 1969 and had been active in the student organisations of the University; founders of Meeting Point were members of the She-hui faction of student activists in early and mid 70s; members of Society for Social Research were the executives of the Hong Kong University Students' Union in the late 70s and early 80s; founders of the New Hong Kong Society predominantly graduated from the Chinese Universtiy in the early 80s, etc.

As these groups expand, they gradually recruit in other categories of people: pressure group leaders (who may also be ex-student-activists), district board members, local community leaders, and individuals interested in their activities for various reasons. Still, they are primarily groups of young, educated middle class.

The only two groups that fall outside this pattern are, perhaps, progressive Hong Kong Society, which attempts to be a 'cross-class' organisation, and Association for Democracy and Public Justice, formed by pressure group leaders and other church-related individuals.

Organisation

The political activist groups formed in the 80s are all small organisations, in terms of number of members. The largest group is Meeting Point which claim to have 300 members, but according to one informant, only 30 to 40 of them are active. The smaller groups usually have 20 to 30 members, and what are active may just be a handful of individuals.

Typically, these political groups would have an elected executive committee, and several committees divided according to policy areas to study different social and political issues. The larger groups would have also a council above the executive committee.

More important, perhaps, is the informal structure, while the smaller groups are basically 'peer group' organisations, the larger groups, it is observed, is being divided into concentric circles of different degree of

commitment and activity, which entails inevitably an oligarchic tendency. And aside from commitment to the goals of the organisations, personal relationship seems to be an important basis of the solidarity of the groups, especially the smaller ones.

One sign of the underdevelopment of the organisation of these groups is that views of their leaders or outspoken members are not usually differentiated from those of the organisation. If fact, the majority of the groups do not seem to have developed among their members coherent set of views, besides some vague, general orientations, and do not have, therefore, 'official lines'.

Ideology

One striking characteristic of the political activist groups is their outward similarity in political stands. All have adopted a cautious and moderate tone and none would dispute the primary importance of 'stability and prosperity'. Upon closer analysis, however, we can detect subtle differences in their orientations.

Three main lines of distinction can be identified: degree of acceptance of the Chinese government, attitudes toward 'democratisation', and attitudes toward social

welfare.

The soverignty issue is now settled. Everybody knows that they have to work within the framework of 'one country two systems', and all agree that 'a high level of autonomy' is essential to the future 'special administrative zone of Hong Kong'. Differences in degree of acceptance of the Chinese government, therefore, exists now in latent rather than manifest , private, psychologicl, rather than organisational, policy level. Therefore, it is not very meaningful to classify the groups according to this line, though some groups seem to have shown a more conciliatory stand towards China. A more useful way is to classify them along the two axes of 'support for democratisation' and 'social welfare'.

To differentiate the positions of the groups along the lines of degree of support for democratisation, however, would not be a straightforward matter. None are explicitly against democratic reforms and none have advocated 'overnight democratisation'. The difference is just between groups that have campaigned actively for democracy and groups that have members publicly expressed reservations towards a democratisation too rapid, and the arguments are essentially over how far and how fast democratic reforms

should be introduced. Democratisaton, however, may be supported for different reasons. While some argue primarily in terms of what are functionally required by the transition of power, others have expressed a desire to bring in contervailing power in a system dominated by bureaucrats. What are heard in public, however, is predominantly the milder, more moderate former position.

Distinctions in position towards social welfare are a bit easier to discern. We have groups that favour a 'more reasonable distribution of resources', i.e. mild redistributionist measures, and those apparently do not regard the 'distribution of resources' as an important problem. Those who are in favour of more social welfare measures, however, tend not to emphasise this facet of their position in public, and their demands for socio-economic reforms exist primarily on paper, not in deeds. A casual observer, therefore, could hardly discern any ideological difference among the political groups in Hong Kong. The most obvious indicator is perhaps, how far the groups are oriented to build up ties with the masses, but there is also a group ostensibly not 'welfarist' but claim to 'cross-class'.

As a kind of 'ideal-type' construction, however, we

can differentiate between a 'liberal' and a 'social democrat' position. For a 'liberal', the ideal society is open, pluralistic, and one that rewards merits, and they are basically identified with the present system of Hong Kong and their main intent is to preserve the existing virtues of Hong Kong. The 'social democrat', on the other hand, while agreeing with the liberals on the virtues of an open society and recognising the necessity of preserving the basic socio-economic framework of Hong Kong, would like to see it become economically more equitable, and to coin the term usaually used in Hong Kong, more 'grassroots-oriented'. The liberals, moreover, can be further differentiated into those who are relatively optimistic and those pessimistic. Those optimistic tend to have more faith on the rationality of the masses and are therefore in favour of more rapid political reforms. Those who are pessimistic, however, in principle not against political reforms, however, have emphasised caution.

The line between 'liberal' and 'social democrat'. however, is very thin. And as has been observed, the majority of the political groupos in Hong Kong have not developed a coherent set of political views, and their ideologies, more often than not, exist as some vague, general orientations rather than explicitly defined official

standpoints. The politicisation of Hong Kong, we should also note, has not been to the extent that we would find political activist groups made up of people exclusively of one ideological orientation, and anyone who tries seriously to divide these groups into clear ideological camps would face difficulties. In fact, there is one orientation that I have left out in the above discussions: the 'obscure'.

Individual Motivations

Motivations are always difficult to gauge and we cannot expect people to be completely frank in telling us why they take part in political activities. But through the observation of their behaviour, analysis of the objective situation, and the explicit statements made, we may be able to arrive at an understanding of what have motivated people to participate in political activist groups.

First, there are those people who think that they were working for some altruistic goals, making contributions to Hong Kong society and/or the future development of China. They are, in short, the idealists.

Idealists, however, differ in their degree of committment, and are not necessarily people that would devote to their cause at all costs, Mr. Lau Nai-Keung,

chairman of the Meeting Pont, for example, explained why he became active in in politics, by the view that a historical opportunity has been created, with which middle class intellectuals can affect the future development of Hong Kong and China, 'without great sacrifices and paying high costs'(Wide Angle, Aug. 16, 1986:22). And a columnist, who is also a member of Meeting Point, lamented the fact that members of the group while willing to give up their leisure time, are afraid of exposing themselves in public (Chan Hong, Economic J'l Daily, July 1, 1985). Similar complaints have been raised by Mr. Chang Ka-Mun, president of the New Hong Kong Society and he explained it in terms if the groups' members' career considerations (Lai Tak Youth Centre, 1985). 'Without great sacrifices', it seems, is important for the more idealistic people of Hong Kong to involve in politics.

There are, however, also individuals that appeared to have a stronger sense of moral conviction. In a statement presenting herself to the 'Joint Conference of Political Opinion Groups on Basic Law' in competition for a position in the Basic Law Consultative Committee, the representative of the Association for Democracy and Public Justice expressed her motivations for participation as such:

> "After conflicts between my reason and emotions, I have decided to be

> a person that has the courage to speak up honestly, although I may have to pay for it....At this time of big exchanges of 'power' and 'interests', I see many people changing, compromising..... I hope myself, guided by my convictions and with the encouragement of friends from different sectors, can preserve an unchanging heart of service in this changing environment. 'Not to be moved by wealth and elevation of status, not to bow before might and violence'."

How far the 'heroism' and 'emotivity' expressed by these statements are representative among the political activists, I have no way to tell. But as a general impression, the great majority tend to be cool-headed people. Afterall, up to now, the tests before them, if there have been any, are not that severe.

More characteristic of their lines of thinking may be the following opinion:

> "The degree and scope of democratic reforms in Hong Kong are subject to limits. Therefore, the risks and costs for the the participants are also correspondingly reduced..... It does not require special gifts to participate in such an interesting game. The younger generation of Hong Kong have never had a chance to show their talents and realise their ambitions. It is completely comprehensible that they are so eager to try." (Tsang, S.K., Economic J'l Daily, Aug. 16, 1985)

But then the participants may have a certain opportunistic character, and objectively the political groups may be instrumental to individual announcement. Some individuals, indeed, are seen as building up a political career with the help of the political groups.While there may be people who are unquestionably idealistic or opportinistic, the line between opportunists and idealists, however, is not hard and fast. People true to their higher values may appear opportunistic sometimes as they have to adapt themselves to an external reality; while those opportunistic may appear more and more idealistic embittered by denial of opportunities. Human motivations, above all, are complicated and fluid.

Both 'idealistic' and 'opportunistic', however, would not be very appropriate to characterise the motivations of participants who are not particulatrly committed to the groups -- people who came up occasionaly in their seminar or study groups, and help out for one or two nights in electoral campaigns. 'For me, it is a life-style', one of my friends who has joined a political group remarked, 'and it allows me contact with the wider society'. Most of the groups, we should also not forget, have at its core personal networks, and con therefore be emotionally gratifying in ways quite unrelated to their social and political roles.

Some, it has been observed, joined the groups simply to know more people, or even to establish business connections.

Definition of Self and Situation

This section deals with how the political activists in Hong Kong see themselves, assess the socio-political situation, and define their role as political actors accordingly. The political groups and activists in Hong Kong differ in their degree of articulation. There are considerable variations in views, and their assessment of the situation changes with the development of the political circumstances. Minding these, and without doing full justice to the richness of their arguments, however, we can still identify a general set of views with which they give meaning to their situation and what they are doing.

Let us begin with their self-identity. With differences across groups and individuals in relative emphasis which reflect differences in ideological orientations and social stations, four elements predominate in the self-concept of the political activists: (1) A new, younger generation of Hong Kong people, (2) Middle Class, (3) Intellectuals, and (4) Professionals.

The 'New Generation' identity indicates a growing

identification with and sense of responsibility towards Hong Kong, and carries sometimes also the connotation they are the more enlightened, forward-looking, and dynamic people, as distinct from the conservative 'sojourners' of an earlier generation. 'Middle Class' implies their sense of belonging to a stratum distinct from the rich and the poor in terms of life-style and life-chances, people with status elevated above the masses but not having the same vested interests in the status quo as the rich. Both 'professionals' and 'intellectuals' carry the meaning of 'men of knowledge'. The term 'professional', however, has the connotations of being functionally improtant and technically indispensable, while the term 'intellectual' implies a broader concern, certain idealism, and a sense of special social and political mission.

In short, the political activists see themselves as people that have a sense of devotion to Hong Kong society, possess certain special competence, and should have, therefore, an obligation to take part in the making of a better Hong Kong.

This sense of obligation to Hong Kong is given specific meaning by their assessment of the social and political situation of Hong Kong and lead to their

self-definition as 'social commentator' and 'critics' on one hand, and 'promoters of political participation' on the other hand.

The formation of groups of social commentators and critics are seen as required by the need to give informed opinion on various public issues, particularly public policies that are increasingly important to the life of Hong Kong people as the society develops, and the general need to supervise the bureacrats, and is, therefore, not necessarily related to the emergence of HongKong's future as a political issue.

The changes associated with the arrangements for Hong Kong's future, however, have provided these groups with some special tasks: to voice their opinion on the design for Hong Kong's future, to promote political reforms, and to supervise the Chinese and Hong Kong authorities in their job of developing a new constitutional framework for Hong Kong.

With a few exceptions that have an obscure position, the political activist groups, it has been noted above, stand generally for democratic reforms. One common piece of argument shared by them is that a certain degree of democratisation is necessitated by the transition of power

to fill the vacuum of authority created by the evacuation of the British and a significant element of direct, open election is indispensable if Hong Kong is to have a legitimate and autonomous government. The issue of Hong Kong's future, some would add, has resulted in unprecedented politicisation in Hong Kong, and the people of Hong Kong are, therefore, more ready for political reforms than before.

None, however, think that conditions in Hong Kong are completely ripe for a full-blown democractisation with the political leaders directly elected in a 'one person one vote' system. They see their tasks as therfore to create more favourbale conditions for democratisation: to foster the development of political talents, and to develop among the masses a more mature civic culture. And the participation of the political groups in elections to different political bodies, it is argued, would serve both purposes.

The political activist, however, are aware that impetus to change in Hong Kong comes not from below but they are at best junior partners. They must play the game according to rules set by others, they invariably admitted, and they connot even set the agenda of discussion as they

like. Members of Meeting Point have a phrase to characterise the limited goals they can have: 'reforms within a cage' (鳥籠改革). The cage is the framwork of Hong Kong as a 'Speical Administrative Zone of China'. And how much space would be available within this cage can be known only after the Chinese leaders disclosed their decisions. While some have produced various political and economic arguments to show that there should be space available, for others, the point is just not to give up before the situation is unmistakably hopeless.

Not all political groups, however, are reform-oriented or active as commentators. The stated goal of one group, for example, is just to provide a link among different sectors in society, while the main intent for the formation of another, according to one of its members, has been to promote positive attitudes among the Hong Kong people towards the changes that must come, and to provide more 'balanced' views.

Action in the System

The press of Hong Kong distinguished the political activist groups into 'political opinion' and 'political participation groups'. While political opinion groups refer to groups that are mainly commentators, political

participation groups refer to groups that have members running for elections. In practice, however, with the notable exception of Meeting Point, which plays a quite central role in the organisation of the electoral campaigns of some of its members, most of the groups do not seem to be an important factor in the elections but just one name in a long list of organisations that support the candidate, and the positions of the groups are binding on their members that have been elected to the District Boards, or Urban and Regional Councils. Positions in these Boards and Councils, which have limited scope of power, moreover, serve primarily to enchance the status of their members and provide them with easier access to the press rather than giving them any direct channel of influence. The political activist groups in Hong Kong, therefore, are first and foremost opinion groups.

While their concerns are broader, the main tactic of the political activist groups, like the pressure groups in the 70s, is to exert pressure on the Govermental authorities through publicity in the mass media, and have become in effect a new, special kind of pressure groups, groups that do not rely on the mobilisation of the masses but the image as learned people. Some of these groups, Moreover, are known to have direct access the officials of the Chinese

and Hong Kong Governments and rely therfore not entirely on the mass media but also on behind the scene lobbying. As these groups do not seem to have significant power bases, the significance of lobbying as a channel of influence would depend above all on the willingness of the authorities to listen to 'more balanced views'. That 'democracy-promotion' groups have to rely on this undemocratic technique of lobbying reflects the power constellation of the present system: whatsoever of their ideals, reforms have to be sought after as 'gifts' granted from above. What have been discussed, we would never know, of course.

Suggestive of the role of the political activist groups in the system is the collective term for them in Hong Kong: 'political opinion sector' (政見界). That Means, rather than groups that articulate and represent different interests in society, these political activist groups from a quite homogeneous circle of people whose main function is to voice out views on political issues-- people specialised in talking politics. In accordance with this image, the political activist groups in Hong Kong are always trying to search for consensus and coordinate their forces. The first attempt is the formation of the 'Joint Conference for the Study of the Green Paper on Representative Government' by the political activist groups and a wide variety of other

bodies in late 1984. Some political groups maintained regular contacts after the issue is over and in 1985, a 'Joint Conference of Political Opinion Groups on Basic Law' (政見團體基本法聯席會議) is formed, to concern itself with the drafting of 'Basic Law', the mini-constitution for Hong Kong after 1997. While collaboration is helpful in enhancing their influence, it is not wothout difficulties. The 'Joint Conference for the Study of Green Paper on Representative Government', for example, had to settle on a declaration that contained only lowest-denominator-type demands, and the groups are known to be divided by mutual jealousies and personal conflicts. Still, the attempt to cooperate has not been abandoned. The Hong Kong Affairs Society, for example, is now trying hard to persuade all other groups to accept its proposals for political reforms. Openly at least, the political activists in Hong Kong are always searching for consensus.

The politiacl activist groups in Hong Kong, however, are not completley isolated. While groups of more established upper-middle class maintained an elitist image and make no serious attempt to establish connections with the masses, the more gressroots-oriented groups are always eager to build up more viable ties with the masses. Whereas the Meeting Point sets up branches itself, a more economic

way is through connections with the pressure groups formed in the 70s, especially the community-based groups. At present, links of the political activist groups with the pressure groups are primarily on an individual level, through the middle-class organisers of the pressure groups who are often also members of the political groups, and anyway, socially and ideologically close to them. As a result of the politicisation engendered by the Hong Kong's future issue and introduction of elections by universal suffrage, moreover, the once apolitical pressure groups are acting more and more like the political activist groups, joining them in voicing out on more general issues and supporting candidates in elections, and ther has been certain collaboration of forces among the political and pressure groups. They have, in fact, forged a common identity with the name 'People's Groups' (民間團体). Another name that serve similar purposes is 'Newly Emergent Political Forces' (新興政治力量).

To develop stronger ties with the masses and local leaders, members of these grassroots-oriented political groups and pressure groups would usually set up offices in their respective districts after they have been elected to receive individual complaints, and deal with local issues. Recently, a new political organisation organised by several

smaller political activist groups are joined by some of these 'offices' of District Board members and several other community-based groups. To a certain extent, the new orgainisation represents a convergence of forces resultant from middle-class politicisation induced by the 'Hong Kong's future' issue on one hand, and grassroots politicisation induced by the introduction of local elections on the other. However, those who have joined the new political organisation are primarily the young educated organisers of community-based groups, not the masses themselves, and to the extent the politicisation of the masses are still limited in Hong Kong, we should not overestimate the organisational strength of these groups. Even the more grassroots-oriented political activist groups in Hong Kong are, therfore, still a long way from developed political organisation with secure mass basses. Unlike the student movement in the 70s, the political activist groups are no longer movements in search of a direction, but they remain leaders in search of followers. And, some admit, time is running out for them.

CHAPTER 5

Selected Case Studies: A Cross-Sectional Analysis

In this chapter, I would present case studies of several representative political activist groups in Hong Kong. The purpose is to provide a more in-depth understanding of the origin, mode of operation, and organisational characteristics of these groups as well as the ideological spectrum they represented. And, to show the general trend of development, the presentation of these case studies would be arranged in order of the date of formation of these groups.

The Hong Kong Observers (香港觀察社)

The Hong Kong Observers is important as the first middle class opinion group in Hong Kong and in many ways it foreshadows the political groups that are to emerge in the 1980s.

It originated as a group of young people invited by the City District Office to express their views on community issues. These young people later formed themselves into a group that discuss various social issues and were joined by other interested individuals. The group was formally registered in 1975.

As a rule, members of the group come from well-to-do families, have enjoyed higher education, and were in an early stage of their career as professionals when they joined the group. One significant influence on them seemed to be that most of them have spent part of their formative years overseas, a fact repeatedly mentioned in articles they introduced themselves. And it is observed that, while they are all ethnically Chinese, they are culturally very Western.

From the very beginning, the group has had a quite 'elitist' public image, but it makes no effort to enlarge its membership base and build up contacts with the masses, which is regarded as unnecessary for the role they choose to play. The Hong Kong Observers, in fact, is never a large group. Reported to have 50 members in 1981, it had only 35 members by late 1985.

The group have two broad aims: to stimulate informed discussions in social and political issues, and to urge the Hong Kong Government to be more responsive. A more fundamental goal, however, is to achieve in Hong Kong, a better quality of life in a more caring environment, which, they argue, would require a generation of a community spirit by the Hong Kong people themselves.

The main activity of the group is social criticism and it is known for its newspaper articles on various social and political issues. It has also championed individual causes against what they consider as improper behaviour on the part of the bureaucrats, notably in the Precious Blood School Incident in 1978 which involved a scandal of corruption on the part of the school authority, student protests, and a government decision to close the school.

Beginning as a quite harsh critic of the Government, the group gradually becomes more and more 'respectable', and it is now known to have frequent access to the government bureaucrats. Taken as a whole, the group seems to be losing momentum and is overshadowed by the political groups sprang up in early 1980s, possibly because that many of its members are now busy professionals with less time to devote to the organisation they created when they were younger and more idealistic.

A columnist, who is also a member of the group, concluded her comments on the Hong Kong Observers in 1982 with the following lines:

> "And essentially, by and large, the Observers believe in the present system. They would like to see an ombudsman installed, and elected members in the Legislative

> Council, a more even distribution of income , but they are reformist, not radical."(SCMP, April 1, 1982)

This comment can be extended to almost all the political activist groups that have emerged in the 80s, except for those even the reformism of which is doubtful.

More importantly, the emergence of the Hong Kong Observers signified a growing political awareness among the middle class as well as an increasing sense of identification with Hong Kong: a Hong Kong people consciousness which seems to be developing in the late 1970s.

Meeting Point (匯點)

Meeting Point is, among the political activist groups in Hong Kong, the most dynamic, organised, and ideologically articulate, and there should be, therefore, a more detailed analysis of the group.

Origin and Development

Meeting Point is formally founded on January 9, 1983, when the Sino-British negotiation on Hong Kong's future was caught in a deadlock over the sovereignty issue. On the same date it was founded, it issued a statement

supporting China's resumption of the sovereignty of Hong Kong with proposals for comprehensive social, economic, and political reforms, and became the first non-Peking sponsored group in Hong Kong that publicly supported China's position in the negotiation.

Organisation of the group, however, began in 1982 as a group of intellectuals coming together to discuss the social issues of Hong Kong. These people are made up of former members of the She-hui faction of the student movement in the mid-1970s as well as other younger university graduates that shared their general ideological orientations.

Primarily a 'peer group' organisation in its first two years of formation, Meeting Point has gradually extended its member base and built up a quite elaborate organisational structure with a council, an executive committee, and committees that study issues in different policy areas. A recent innovation is to set up branches in different localities, a development related to the election of some of its members to the district boards.

Membership Characteristics

Meeting Point has in early 1986 around 300 members,

counting also a category of membership called 'Friends of Meeting Point' (匯點之友) which made up about a half of the total number. According to the estimation of one member, however, only thirty to fourty people are active in the various activities of the group.

An outstanding characteristic of the members of Meeting Point is that they are predominantly young and highly educated. According to an internal survey carried out by the group, 70% of the group's members are from 26 to 35 in age, and 90% of the members have received post-secondary education. More strikingly, one-quarter of the members have obtained higher degrees, a remarkable phenomenon in Hong Kong where a tiny proportion of the small percentage of the young people that enter into university would continue to do graduate work, and it suggests that members of the group tend to be exceptionally intellectually oriented. The same survey, in fact, discovers as the main interests of the members 'study of the social issues of Hong Kong and China'.

As for occupations, about half of the members are employed in educational institutions, social service agencies, and the media, with others in commerce, finance, legal profession, etc. A predominant majority of Meeting

Point's members, the information suggests, are semi-professionals, and as a corollary of their youth, it is observed, they are usually not established in their respective professions (Meeting Point, 1986:3).

Ideology

Officially, the general orientations of Meeting Point is defined in terms of three loose principles they named 'New Three People's Principles': nationalism, democracy, and (concern for) people's livelihood.

Nationalism, refers, of course,to Chinese nationalism, and it is continually emphasised by the group. Members of Meeting Point , however, do not seem to be ardent nationalists that have an unconditional, and unreflexive emotional identification with China. Nationalism to them is rather something that can be and should be argued for, and they take pains to state that 'identification with the nation is not equivalent to identification with the regime'. This emphasis on nationalism serves obviously the strategic purpose of setting the group apart from people that wish to use democracy to keep out Peking's influence in the eyes of the Chinese leaders, but what pleases Peking does not seem to please the public of Hong Kong --- there are people who consitently think that Meeting Point is too pro-China to be

acceptable.

Democracy is Meeting Point's main object of campaign. Officially, democracy is argued for in terms of human rights and more importantly, as functionally necessary for a highly autonomous, stable, and legitimate government. More privately, however, members of the group express a desire to introduce 'countervailing power' into a system dominanted by bureaucrats. While Meeting Point is quite consistent in demanding for democratic reforms, a certain moderation of tone over its years of development can be discerned. In 1983, 'widespread participation of the people', it was argued, 'is a necessary condition for the creation of a good Hong Kong in the future' (Meeting Point, 1984:2-3) however, the main goal of democratic reforms in Hong Kong is to 'fulfill the aim of Hong Kong as a highly autonomous Special Administrative Zone', i.e. democracy is necessary to complete the design initiated at the top (Meeting Point, recruitment pamphlet, 1986).

'Deradicalisation' is also discernible in the sphere of 'people's livelihood', i.e. social and economic reforms. In the 'Proposals for Hong Kong's Future' issued in 1983, we see more radical proposals like popular supervision of public utilities, encouragement of the growth of trade

unions, even labour participation in management. In 1984, one principle underlying Meeting Point's stand in social policy is 'more equitable distribution of resources to shorten the distance between social strata' (Meeting Point, 1984:58). In 1986, however, the goal of social policy is to 'take care of the interests of various social strata, and to provide equal opportunity of development for all citizens' (Meeting Point, 1986:17), and in the recruitment pamphlet, we find under the heading 'Stand in People's Livelihood' not even the standard phrase 'more reasonable distribution of resources', but an additional qualifying principle stipulating that 'policies concerning "people's livelihood" should consider also technical feasibility, political accountability, and financial solvency'.

In a general way, traces of the influence of the thinking of the She-hui faction can be seen in the orientations of Meeting Point, for example, in its emphasis on popular participation and in its argument that the future of Hong Kong is inseparable from that of China. The mild reformism of Meeting Point, however, is far removed from the radicalism of the student activists in mid-1970s. As an official of the group put it, to maintain a more favourable image in the public, Meeting Point must appear 'balanced and squarely in the centre' (四平八穩), a stance unthinkable for

the radical student activists but indispensable now for Meeting Point for its saleability in the 'political market'.

This 'deradicalisation', however, is more than a strategic withdrawal in face of unfavourable political circumstances. It is rather a necessary corollary of Meeting Point's enlargement of membership base and attempt to find a legitimate place in the existing institutions. Ten years' encounter with the hard social reality, moreover, do seem to have its impact. 'While we should not abandon the radical vision of a good society, we have to maintain a distance between our theory and our practice', a founding member of Meeting Point and formerly a leading figure of the she-hui faction told the author.

Activities

Initially organised as a forum to exchange ideas, Meeting Point has turned into an opinion group, and then also an electoral group, following the development of political circumstances.

The politically relevant activities of the group can be divided into three main categories: first, continual concern for the design of future political institutions of Hong Kong, both that initiated by Hong Kong government and

that by Peking; second, supporting candidates in District Board and Urban Council elections; and third, study of and comments on various public policies, with an aim to develop 'alternative policies'. A new attempt is to involve in community issues and build up ties with local residents, through setting up brances.

Problems and Prospects

The most pressing problem of Meeting Point is finance, as the group relies primarily on members' subscription and can obtain no substantial donation, and this may explain partly Meeting Point's drive to expand its membership base, which in turn contributes to its moderation. An innovation to solve the problem is to develop affiliated businesses for the group, notably a consultant firm that provides economic information about China.

Another problem relates to the members' involvement in the group's activities. The obvious obstacle is, of course, these people all have their own regular jobs and can participate in the functions of the organisation at their leisure time. Moreover, it is observed that participation rapidly falls off in between the elections, which themselves are losing appeal as the freshness has gone. One of the

group's aim to establish branches is, in fact, to provide more meaningful involvement for the members.

A further problem is that people still identify the group with its prominent members, and the opinions expressed by these individuals therefore would be confused with the official stand of the group, frustrating its 'image-building' efforts and sometimes causing diplomatic difficulties. Meeting Point, however, is ostensibly trying to revert this tendency. Using as far as possible different spokespersons in different occasion, it tries to build up an independent image of the group and differentiate it from the persons of 'political stars' in it.

All the above mentioned problems indicate the premature state of Meeting Point, the 'most developed political activist group in Hong Kong', as a political organisation. The attempted solutions, however, are part of the parcel of its attempt to build up a more viable organisation. Meeting Point is in the direction of becoming a party, its chairman declared in an open forum in March 1986. But in practice, the approach is very cautious. According to the group's schedule, a platform which translates the abstract principles into concrete proposals would be completed in three years' time --- obviously a

political, more than administrative decision --- as what would be acceptable by the authorities would be clear three years later. Using perhaps not a not very appropriate term, a member of the Meeting Point characterises the approach of the group as 'incremental', i.e. it would watch after each step is taken. 'We would not set our goals too high', the Vice-Chairman of the group told the students in a visit to the Chinese University of Hong Kong. 'Just achieve the limited that is possible if we have only limited resources'. Therefore, rather than an organisation to share power in the future governing of Hong Kong, more realistically, it is described as one of the media that promotes the politicisation of Hong Kong.

Hong Kong Affairs Society (太平山學會)

Hong Kong Affairs Society is another more dynamic and organisationally developed political activist group in Hong Kong. In support of democratic reforms, the general orientation of this group is quite different from that of the more reformist groups like Meeting Point, and represents another ideological current among the politically aware middle class of Hong Kong.

Origin

Hong Kong Affairs Society was founded in February

1984, in response to the crisis generated by the rapid devaluation of the Hong Kong dollars in September 1983, and gained prominence in the public through the two forums on Hong Kong's future it organised in 1984.

Founders of the group, like that of many others, are people that knew one another when they were students and maintained contacts after graduation. They have been active in Literary Clubs in the 60s and later in the student organisations of Hong Kong University. Some of them had taken part in the 'Protect Tiao-Yu-Toi Islands Campaign'. In short, they belong to the first generation of student activists in Hong Kong which appeared in late 60s and early 70s. And participation in these activities, Huang Chen-ya, the group's present president, admitted, did have an impact on their social and political consciousness , although he thought what was more important was the growing up of a new generation in Hong Kong the movements reflected.

Membership Characteristics

Beginning with a membership of about 30 in 1984, the group has now around 100 members, which are again predominantly young and highly educated. At least as far as the core members are concerned, however, though still predominantly below 40, members of the group are slightly

older than most of the other organisations, and are more established in their respective professions.

Ideology

Consistent with the official image of the group as a forum for the exchange of divergent ideas, Hong Kong Affairs Society, unlike Meeting Point, does not have officially defined guiding principles. We can, however, discern the dominant line of thought of the group through a study of its various articles and statements on social and political issues, as well as from the views aired publicly by its leading members.

In simplified terms, the underlying ideology of the group is a belief in capitalism, open society, and pluralistic political system --- indeed, all the standard liberal values. Consistently, the group has emphasised procedural justice, and 'fair play', which means equal opportunity for all concerned parties, is their catchword.

Their diagnosis of the political situation is that the transition of power in the return of Hong Kong's sovereignty to China necessitates the introduction of a more representative political system with directly elected political leaders if Hong Kong is to maintain a high degree

of autonomy and viability. Such a system, it is reasoned, would be legitimate, flexible and best able to foster the development of high-quality local political leaders. And direct elections, in the group's opinion, would not pose any threat to the economic status quo. Poor people are also rational people, the group argues, and to shut off their opportunity for participation would just force them to use uninstitutionalised means of influence. That there should be institutionalised conflict and compromises among different values and interests is, in fact, the fundamental belief of the group, a belief manifested in the original purpose of providing a forum for the exchange of conflicting views and in their recent proposal for a proportional representation system in Hong Kong. What is most important to them is that there should be 'rules of the game' accepted by all.

The above represents the public stand of the Hong Kong Affairs Society and its focus is on the situation of Hong Kong. On a more private level, however, core members of the group are motivated by ideals that have a wider frame of reference. Having been active in the literary clubs, they are known to be heavily influenced by the Chinese scholars that came to Hong Kong after 1949 and have developed a strong cultural identification with China --- to

them, an open, pluralistic political system is not only the solution to Hong Kong's problem, but also the way out of China's predicament. 'We must do something', Huang Chen-ya told the author in the interview. 'The mistakes of Chinese history should not be allowed to repeat themselves'. And what is of primary importance, he pointed out, is to promote an open, tolerant, and participant political culture. His concern, obviously, is not just Hong Kong, but the Chinese nation.

Development and Prospects

As it is now, Hong Kong Affairs Society is much more than just a forum. It is an opinion group that has developed its own specific stands: a commentator on political issues and a critic of the 'inappropriate behaviour' of the governmental authorities. In 1986, one of its core members has been elected to the Urban Council, and the group has recruited in members who are eager to participate in elections. Hong Kong Affairs Society, therefore, seems now to be on the brink of becoming more active in participating in the political institutes. But there are objections among some of its members , and taken as a whole, the group is hesitant. One manifestation of this hesitation is the confusion over the group's role in the performance of duties of its members that have been

elected Urban Councillors and District Board members.

Hong Kong People's Association (港人協會)

Hong Kong People's Association originated in 1984 when it was known that Britain had given up its demand for continuation of its administration in Hong Kong after 1997 and was formally founded in December 1984 with 31 members, which were part of the individuals that had signed an advertisement pledging Hong Kong people to 'take up the challenge' posed by the oncoming changes.

What made the group stand out is the composition of its members. As professionals, senior executives, and university lecturers, they belong to Hong Kong's first generation of professional, managerial, and intellectual elite that has emerged in the 1970s. Primarily graduated from the same university, and not more than 5 years different in age, unlike the founding members of Meeting Point and Hong Kong Affairs Society, however, members of the Hong Kong People's Association have not been influenced by any 'deviant' ideologies, neither Neo-leftism nor Neo-Confucianism. And it is not without reason that they were seen at the time by others as the most hopeful candidates to inherit power from the colonial bureaucrats. They are, in fact, among the emerging leaders of Hong Kong,

the same type of people that are playing an increasingly important role in various sectors of Hong Kong, including the bureaucracy --- some of its members had actually been Administrative Officers of the bureaucracy before they turned to the private sector.

The group, however, do not seem to have developed any coherent set of views among its members on social and political issues in Hong Kong besides the general aim of fostering a stable transition of sovereignty, and the role the group has intended to play in the system remains ambiguous. It looked ambitious in the early stage of its formation with the declared aims to build up an 'above-class' organisation composed of people from different strata and prepare for the direct elections to Legislative Council that is believed to come after 1987, and it did show some drive in supporting candidates in the District Board Elections in March 1985. The group, however, seemed to have lost momentum rapidly. There was information that the group was going to be dissolved in December 1985, and in April 1986, the group was reported to be having agreed on playing the limited role of a mere social commentator.

As outsiders, it is difficult to know why the group's members decided on a withdrawal from an obviously

more ambitious initial position. What we can learn from the retreat is, perhaps, that emergence of independent political leaders would not be an easy matter in Hong Kong: there does not seem to be many candidates with potentials that possess the will to try, or the objective conditions are so unfavourable that these people do not see any reasonable opportunity for success.

Progressive Hong Kong Society (香港勵進會)

In different degrees, all the above discussed groups have embodied 'deviant' orientations in Hong Kong, whose founders are at least exceptionally conscientious people. This is not so for the Progressive Hong Kong Society which as a group is as pragmatic as any Hong Kong people. And what it reflects are the 'political opportunities' available in Hong Kong.

The image of the group is closely tied to the person of Miss Maria Tam, its chairman, a political entrepreneur that worked her way up as an elected Urban Councillor and has later been appointed a member of the Legislative Council and Executive Council, whose fame was at a new height in March, 1985, after playing successfully the role of patron for several candidates running for the district board elections. And it was the time the formation of the group

was publicly announced.

Founding members of the group include members of some established business families, urban councillors, district board members, a Legislative Councillor, and several publicly prominent professionals, as well as a few trade union leaders. It is, however, the participation of the rich families that have attracted the most attention and the group is known to be supported by these families through a trust fund.

What make Progressive Hong Kong Society a class of its own, however, is not only the status of its members and the support from the rich, but also that it declines to express any specific stand on any social and political issues. It seems to have only one principle --- to build up a cross-class organisation in which people from different social stratum can exchange their views so that policies acceptable to all can be formulated. After more than one year of formation, however, such an exchange does not appear to be particularly fruitful, and except for once in its first annual general meeting, in which some very general, lowest-denominator type pricniple were announced on economic policies, no concluded views have been made public.

Interest aggregation is the work of political parties, and the formulation of all-acceptable comprehensive policies makes little sense if the group is not going to be a ruling institution. Office-bearers of the group, however, have repeatedly emphasised that the froup is not a political party. Since it was founded the group has consistently maintained a low political profile, and what the members of the group are going about are little known in public.

Outwardly, the basic strategy of the group is 'fence-sitting' --- wait and see which course of action is the most rewarding and which stand is the safest to take. But it does not seem to be just sitting there inertly. One-tenth of the members of the Basic Law Consultative Committee, it has been noted, are members of the Progressive Hong Kong Society.

'What the Progressive Hong Kong Society engaged in', an observer remarked, 'is "secondary political organisation"'. That is, rather than organising the masses, it tries to recruit individuals that already possess certain political capital and can either appeal to or are connected with the masses. And the group seems to be relatively successful in obtaining the sympathy, if not support, of the Chinese authority.

'The group plays the role of an agent for the big Chinese capitalists who are not at the center of power of the colony without committing too much of their resources', another observer remarked to the author. If direct elections are really important in selecting the future government, the group can serve as the electoral organisation for the capitalists. Or, at least, it can serve as a coordinating committee for individuals interested in 'politics' as a 'honour-distribution' system.

Suggestive of the role of Tam, its chief organiser, intends the group to play is her proposal that the business families of Hong Kong should form into an organisation to support a political party financially, and therefore, to rule indirectly, following the example of the influential Japan Federation of Economic Organisation.

Such an idea, however, is reported to be objected by some members of the executive committee of the group as it would obviously violate the official 'cross-class' orientation of the group (see Jan 7, 1986 SCMP). And it remains to be seen, how class lines can really be crossed by the Progressive Hong Kong Society.

As a 'party of notables', it can be expected, the

Progressive Hong Kong Society is not noted for internal cohesiveness. Tensions developed among its members, it is reported, over who should run as candidates in the indirect elections to the Legislative Council in 1985, and its members turned out competing against each other for the same seat. The group matters, it seems, so far as it serves the individual ambitions of its members.

The prominence of the Progressive Hong Kong Society enjoyed despite its lack of any ideology, a cohesive organisation, and viable connections with the masses reveals that the more important political capital in Hong Kong are still individual personal image and support of people at the top, the rich and the governmental authorities.

The close tie of the group with the personal image of Miss Maria Tam, however, does show itself to be an weakness. When the candidate supported by Tam failed in the election to the Urban Council in 1986, people were quick to ask: what would be the fate of the Progressive Hong Kong Society? The ups and downs of Maria Tam, it seems, is also the ups and downs of the Progressive Hong Kong Society, which may be no more than a kind of 'patron-client network' with Tam at its centre(1).

Hong Kong Association for Democracy and People's Livelihood

(香港民主民生協進會)

While Hong Kong Affairs Society and Hong Kong People's Association are creation of the university graduates of the late 60s and and early 70s, and Meeting Point early and mid 70s, Hong Kong Association for Democracy and People's Livelihood is primarily the work of still younger people, who graduated from the post-secondary institutions of Hong Kong in the late 70s and early 80s.

The organisation originated as an attempt by three small political opinion groups, Hong Kong Policy Viewer, New Hong Kong Society , and Soceity for Social Research, and a district-based organisation, Shamshuipo People's Livelihood Concern Group, to collaborate their forces and was later joined by other groups like Association for Democracy and Public Justice and Septentrio Academy, and various offices of district board members. The purpose is to overcome the limits of the existing organisation as instrument of political participation by building up a larger, more effective organisation. The formation of the group was publicly announced in April, 1986, and the process of formal registration has not yet been completed.

The new organisation, however, is not strictly

speaking, a coalition of the groups, nor does it lead to the dissolution of the existing groups. The structure of the old groups are preserved, and their members participated individually in the new organisation on a voluntary basis. The point is to maintain at the present moment maximum flexibility while creating a group with more united purpose.

The new organisation is noted for its connections with locally based people's livelihood concern groups and offices of district board members, side products of the establishment of district boards. However, the link of the organisation with these groups is on an individual rather than an organisational level, and it is predominantly the young college-graduate organisers of these groups dissatisfied with merely dealing with mundane local issues that have joined the new organisation. The same apply for the 'pressure- groups' whose leaders as a whole are not active in the new organisation. A gap, it seems, still exists between the broader orientations of the young intellectuals and the day-to-day concern of the grassroots.

The organisation is distinguished from the above analysed groups also for the fact that it has a clear platform with quite concrete proposals. In general, the group's stand is for a popularly elected government, more

active role of the government in economy, more protection to the weak and unfortunate, and more rights to the labour. The tone, however, is mild and the organisation takes care to place the objective 'to preserve the stability and prosperity of Hong Kong and promote economic development', before the clause 'to promote a more reasonable distribution of resource and improve the qualities of life of the middle and lower strata' in its constitution.

The organisation also has a quite detailed constitution reflecting perhaps the experience its founders gained in student organisations. Most 'party-like' in design, however, its spokesman still said that it is not a political party, but a political association aiming to participate in politics and to study public policies.

The groups has now recruited about 100 members. Most of them, like the members of other groups, are young college graduates, and at this very early stage, its development is yet to be seen.

Note

(1) Lemarchard(1981) defines 'patron-client' ties as bonds between individuals of unequal power and socioeconomic status, voluntarily entered into and derive their legitimacy from expectations of mutual benefits.

CHAPTER 6

Reflections on the Conditions for Political Action in Hong Kong

I have argued in chapter 2 that while Hong Kong society has been largely 'depoliticised' as a result of the colonial bureaucracy's skillfull co-optation of the socio-economic elites and the political alienation of an immigrant Chinese population which inclines to solve its problems within its own social organisation, the rise of a new generation, emergence of an educated middle class, and progressive politisation of social issues should generate pressures for politics outside the bureaucracy in Hong Kong. In chapter 3, I show that the political awakening of the young people in Hong Kong can be traced back to the mid 1960s and pressure group politics has been developing since the 1970s. The picture of political activist groups I present through chapter 4 to chapter 5, however, reveals that only a small minority of the educated middle class in Hong Kong has participated in these political groups even at a time when fundamental political changes are bound to be introduced into Hong Kong in the process of decolonisation,

and the commitment of those who have participated do not seem to be particularly strong. The majority of the members of the political groups, in fact, can be regarded as people belong to subcultural communities, if we use the term subculture in a loose sense.

The socio-economic conditions LaPalombara and Weiner(1966:19-21) suggest as prerequisites for the development of political parties are largely present in Hong Kong, and an incipient participation crisis seem to be developing in Hong Kong with the 'pressure groups' stepping up their demands in early 1980s, even without the emergence of the issue of Hong Kong's future. The organisation of political groups in Hong Kong, however, remains at a very primitive stage. It is invariably the middle classes, it has been noted, that have provided political leadership in the peripheral couries (Johnson, 1985). The prime majority of the educated middle class in Hong Kong, yet, do not want to have any part in politics. At this time of 'state crisis', people with vested interests in the present system, should have come up and defend it; and those with misgivings towards the system, should try to promote their desired changes. Interests in politics, however, remain low in Hong Kong and what we face here is not simply mass passivity but political passivity of elites and would-be elites.

One possible explanation for the phenomenon is what has happened is a truncated development. The political groups are still at a very early stage of development, when China showed its reservations towards rapid democratic reforms and development of political parties. Therefore, people are discouraged from joining the political groups and the development of the organisation of the existing groups is hindered, if not arrested.

While an 'inheritance party' to take over from the colonial bureaucrats seems to be unacceptable to the Chinese leaders, there are, however, still room to influence the future development of Hong Kong, and Chinese leaders have recognised the status of the political groups in Hong Kong by providing them with positions in the Basic Law Consultative Committee. And in the forseeable future it is unlikely that joining the political groups would involve any personal danger. Moreover, it is also doubtful whether the existing groups could have shown more dynamism, given the limited commitment of the members.

Another possible explanation is that the socioeconomic elites of of Hong Kong, who have always relied on the colonial government to take care of their interests, see any political innovations as as potential threats to their

entrenched positions in the colony. Therefore, rather than supporting the political groups, they try to court Peking and persuade the Chinese leaders to maintain as far as possible the present system. Their interests, it can be argued, will be well served in a 'colonial system' with a changed master, and their attitude towards the political groups is one of scarcely concealed suspicion, if not antagonism.

This may explain why political organisation of the elites has been so lukewarm in Hong Kong. Yet those that have not enjoyed access to the Chinese leaders should not remain so inactive, and a political organisation with an adequate membership base would not require the patronage of the economic elites.

Anyway, if the limits are simply something out there, then we should discern among the people of Hong Kong a deep sense of frustration, and even heart-felt anger. The majority of the people in Hong Kong, however, seem to be disillusioned from the very beginning and the feeling is, as far as I can sense it, not very deep. The sense of political powerlessness, even among the educated and young, it seems, is greater than the political reality would require, and they give up before making the very first attempt.

It is now tempting to invoke Chinese political culture as an explanation. Is it that the Hong Kong Chinese like those the Chinese scholar Liang Chi-Chao met in the Chinatowns of America, being 'clannish rather than public-spirited, slaves to tradition rather than progressive, dedicated to the purpsuit of selfish gain and indifferent to the larger welfare of the community', are incapable of making use of the considerable opportunity for political organisaton and self-expression? (Grieder, 1981:167) Or can we argue, along with Pye(1968) and Soloman(1971), that the Chinese are irreparably authoritarian and have a hysterical fear for airing differences in opinion? And does Hong Kong's political groups' hesitation over taking more active part in politics reflects traditional Chinese scholars' anxiety over involving in struggle for power as a result of the general distrust of government of any kind among the Chinese? (Gray, 1979:204)

The problem how far traditional Chinese patterns of behaviour have been modified in Hong Kong awaits further investigations. Open criticisms of government, however, can now be seen almost every day in Hong Kong television, and the people of Hong Kong would go readily to petition the Governor if the bureaucracy fails them. The 'parochial'

overseas Chinese, moreover, we should remember, had been the main source of financial support of the republican movement in China in the turn of the century, when the cause did not look very hopeful.The urban middle class of Taiwan, another Chinese community, has organised a more viable 'Dang-Wai'(黨外 'Outside-the-Party') movement as an opposition to the ruling Nationalist Party, in face of a much more hostile authority. And, at an earlier stage of economic development, political mobilisation has been widespread in Singapore on the eve of independence.

Still another line of argument is that in face of fundamental, and possibly disruptive changes of the political system, the middle class of Hong Kong opt for an 'exit' rather than 'voice' choice. Instead of taking up the challenges in Hong Kong, they choose to emigrate overseas. Why so many people would opt for an 'exit' choice, however, is itself a significant problem, and those who can emigrate, after all, is a minority.

The editorial of a newspaper widely read by the educated middle class of Hong Kong has an answer to our problems:

> "We are not ignorant that it is cowardly to mind just economic striving but not political participation, but we think that

> this is the only way the people of Hong Kong can survive. In politics, Hong Kong people have always been cowardly. We have had no courage to fight the colonial government, and no courage to struggle with the Japanese. Why should we now have the courage to receive the 'burning stick' the British pass to us" (H.K.Economic J'l, Dec. 16, 1985)

However, it does not require much heroism to join the political groups, which up to now are not fighting anybody. What has incapacitated the people of Hong Kong is a less than rational sense of powerlessness, a kind of direct reaction rather than outcome of rational evaluation, and what is lacking seems to be will and commitment.

The questions why there has been such an ingrained sense of powerlessness and why the commitment is so weak can be answered only with a wild stretch of immagination. Keniston's discussions on young educated Americans' social alienation and lack of reformist zeal may provide us with some inspirations. As a melting pot, Keniston (1971:27-80) notes, the American society lacks from the beginning clear traditions and definitions of good life. The specialisation and abstractness of work, even among the professionals, lead to the dissociation of imagination from problems in everday life and human imagination becomes tied to 'packaged

fantansies' provided by the mass media which are often the opposites of what they experience in life. Social cohesion, thus gained, he argues, is not cohesion of shared goals but of shared escapes and dreads. Material progress, moreover, leave the people with no significant cause to strive for. Rapid, unguided social changes lead to rapid obsolence of ethics and development of types of social character whose commitment is to adapt to the shifting pressures of the environment, as well as a strong present orientation and privatism to provide a stronger sense of mastery over the environment. And men feel powerless before a social order in whose day-to-day workings they are technically enmeshed but whose direction they feel unable to judge. Above all, there is a 'long-term decline of positive morality, which has not only left men unable to visualize a better future, but has deprived them articulate bases to judge the present' (Keniston, 1971: 45). What Keniston have observed, in fact, are not only the specific conditions of American society but also the general conditions of modern industrial societies.

The study of Japanese political orientations by Flanagan (1978:129-161) is also illuminating. The Japanese, he finds, while rank high in political knowledge, exhibit a very low level of political involvement and activism, a set of orientations he terms 'spectator culture' and he explains

the phenonmenon in terms of the uncontested incorporation of different social classes into the political system of Japan which preceded the development of strong demands for participation. And, we should note, there have been similar findings on the political culture of Hong Kong (King, 1977:147-168).

A further hint is provided by Pye(1971:121), who argues, admist rapid social changes, people of the new states most usually focus on the present and avoid as much as possible all questions about the meaning of the past or the prospect for the future, as a result of ambivalence towards the past and anxiety over an uncertain future.

We are now in a better position to explain why Hong Kong people's involvement in political activism is so low. Perhaps more than any society in the world, the social cohesion of Hong Kong is based on common escapes and dreads, not common purposes. The first generation of immigrant population live here as 'refugees' and 'sojourners'. The impersonal and competitive society, however, does not foster among the second generation a strong sense of identification with the society. Social alienation of the immigrants are perpetuated by the conditions of an industrial-capitalist society. The 'parochialness' of Chinese peasants is simply

replaced by the 'privatism' of the alienated workers and middle class. And in a market economy of relentless competition, what predominates has to be amoral egoism. Hong Kong, it is often noted, is a market place where everyone comes here to get what he or she wants and it is liked to the extent that it can deliver the desired goods. Commitment to the society, therefore, remains instrumental and 'exit' is preferable than 'voice' as it would provide more certain outcome for the individual(1).

And more than the Americans, Hong Kong people do not have any positive values to judge their society and base a vision of better future. Capitalism is accepted pragmatically. Socialism is not an ideal, but a reality across the border where living standards are much lower and political upheavals often heard. The dominant social values come from the parochial 'small tradition' of Chinese peasants and are on the wane in a complex urban-industrial society, and Western liberal and egalitarian ideals are scarcely understood even among the highly educated. Therefore values like 'participation' and 'public justice' espoushed by some of the reformist groups evoke no enthusiastic response, and demands for social and economic reforms are simply interpreted as selfish desires on the part of the lower income groups to enlarge their share of

the pie. And those profess reformist ideals are invariably viewed with suspicion and cynicism. After all, general improvements in living standards have left no burning issues to rally the support of the more idealistic.

Not having any modest collective ideals, Hong Kong people are also not accustomed to organise themselves to further their sectional interests, at least not at a large scale. Like the Japanese, Hong Kong people have little experience of competitive mobilisation. The colonial authority had timely incorporated in newly emergent socio-economic elites before they developed any strong demand for participation, and their interests are in any case well served in the present system. And the middle and lower classes are preoccupied with improving their conditions through individual, or more usually, familial efforts, which seem promising in a rapidly expanding economy. They lack therefore both experiences of political organisation and a clear definition of communities of interests prerequisite to effective political action.

One reason Hong Kong people do not have any vision of a better future is that they do not think such vision realisable. For the people of Hong Kong, future is always beyond their control. Politically, as a capitalist colony

endorsed by a socialist superpower, a large part of Hong Kong people's destiny seems from the very beginning uncertain. Economically, Hong Kong people are aware that Hong Kong is but a small manufacturing station in a global economic system and their fortune is tied to events in far away part of the world in which they could have little control. And more directly, they have to feel confused and powerless before a rapidly changing complex industrial society with minute specialisation. Their sense of powerlessness in front of the changes of the larger society is therefore rooted in their everyday experiences. And the people of Hong Kong have learned to be adaptable and flexible, to fit oneself to the world, rather than to shape the world as one desires, not to say that a great power of abstraction is needed to visualise a better society than one lives in. The great majority, therefore, consent to leave the 'public businesses' to the bureaucrats, even though from time to time, they may be quite dissatisfied with what the bureaucrats have designed or done for them.

Sense of powerlessness is conducive to 'privatism' and 'present orientation', and perhaps again more than any society of the world, the people of Hong Kong are troubled by an ambivalence towards their past and anxiety over their future. The reason why they are so anxious over their future

should now be plain and as culturally proud Chinese they are also troubled by having subjected willingly to the colonial authority and the erosion of Chinese values they see in Hong Kong. The editorial quoted above has, for example, manifested quite clearly the troubled conscience of the people of Hong Kong. The majority of the people of Hong Kong therefore have steadily refused to look too far ahead or beyond. The less privileged are, of course, always preoccupied with their day-to-day struggle for survival. But even those more disposed to plan for their future have also seemed stop thinking about what Hong Kong would become in the course of returning its sovereignty to China, although they have little trust on the guarantees of the authorities. In face of inevitable changes, the middle classes of Hong Kong just desperately try to maintain a hold on what they already have and become more conservative than ever.

Thus, it should be clear now why so few people have participated in the political groups, and why the commitment of those have participated remains so low. Those who have been active are either exceptionally idealistic or interested in a political career. Hong Kong is not a society favourable to the development of ideals and the future of a political career is still too uncertain to be very attractive. Political activists in Hong Kong, if they

worth the name, therefore, necessarily form a small circle.

We should also understand why space for political action in Hong Kong is so 'compressing'. As a small dependent open economy, all socioeconomic reforms introduced in Hong Kong have to be limited in scope in face of the deinvestment threat of the capitalists. And all political changes, it has been noted, must be within the framework of Hong Kong as a 'special administrative zone' of China, and the dominant attitude of the socio-economic elites toward the political groups is less than favourable. But, more importantly, the political groups are not supported by any significant section of the Hong Kong public. No ideals can appeal to them, and they lack the will and experience to band up to protect their self-interests. Important changes are bound to be introduced, but the spectators are not psychologically prepared to take up the role of actors. In Hong Kong, impetus to change has to come from above because there has been so little from below.

The political groups of Hong Kong, therefore, must always appear moderate and balanced, and must cluster in the middle of the road. For they rely on nothing other than the image as people that have more 'balanced views'. Supported by nobody, moreover, they cannot afford to antagonise

anybody: they have to take care of not only the likes and dislikes of the two government authorities, but also the sensitivities of a wide array of 'spectators'. To cope with the situation, the criteria of succeess some of the activists adopt are now not that of the politicians but that of the community workers and educators. Therefore, their goal is not to get power, but to promote political consciousness.

Note

(1) A study of secondary school students in Hong Kong found that they identified with no social group beyond the nuclear family. The students' problem reflected that of their parents and these students should now be young adults (Cheung, 1979).

CHAPTER 7

Conclusion

The political activist groups in Hong Kong, the present study shows that, are primarily organisations of young educated middle class. While the political awakening of the second generation of Hong Kong can be traced back to mid 1960s, and some of the groups originate before the emergence of the 'Hong Kong's future' issue, the profileration of political groups in Hong Kong is conditioned by the Sino-British negotiation on Hong Kong's future. And their development is stimulated by the introduction of local universal suffrage elections in Hong Kong, which can be interpreted as partly a response to an incipient participation crisis generated by the politisation of community issues, and partly a first step in decolonisation. The political groups now function primarily as commentators on government action and policies, and some of them have supported candidates in local elections. In terms of orientations, three broad types of groups can be identified: (a) those to promote reforms when political changes have to be introduced, (b) those to preserve the desired general properties of the existing system, and (c)

those organised by the elites to protect or enhance their power. Even the reformist groups, however, are very moderate in tone, and ideological differences among them are not easily discernible.

That the groups are mainly formed of educated middle class reflects the class' strategic position for political practice as a result of the authority they enjoyed as 'men of knowledge' and their relative freedom to align with any other social classes, a situation similar both to other developed and developing countries (see Gouldner, 1979:85-88; Johnson, 1985). The primary motivating force for participation, however, is traditional Chinese intellectuals' sense of social and political mission, while it demonstrates at the same time Western intellectuals' distance from the dominant values of their societies(1). And collectively they form a new 'politicalgeneration' or, more strictly speaking, 'political generation unit' in Hong Kong (2).

It is only, however, a small minority of the young educated middle class that have joined these political groups, still less take an active part, and the thin social support the political groups have become their chief source of weakness. Space for political action is compressing for

them not only because they must secure the co-operation of both the Chinese and Hong Kong governments in the fulfillment of their goals but also because they can nowhere draw enthusiastic support among a public passive and not sure what to want.

The low involvement of the people of Hong Kong in political activism, it is tentatively argued, is rooted in the historical-structural context of Hong Kong as a relatively developed but dependent capitalist colony on the soils of socialist China, which has precluded the development of shared ideals and fostered a strong sense of powerlessness, privatism, and present orientation. Moreover, the successful cooptation of socio-economic elites by the colonial bureaucracy and the availability of opportunities for upward mobility have also resulted in paucity of political experiences and diffuse class consciousness not conducive to political organisation.

Some groups are now trying to build up stronger ties with the masses through neighbourhood organisations. Whether neighbourhoods can serve as an effective social base for political mobilisation, however, is doubtful(3). Given the present 'powerlessness' of the political groups, their future development would depend, above all, on the design of

the institutional framework by the two authorities. If direct elections are introduced to the Legislative Council, some groups may join together and others expand to form more effective electoral organisations(4). If the present conditions persist, with less enthusiasm perhaps, they would continue to play the role of opinion and electoral groups. If space for action contracts to the extent that nothing meaningful can be achieved in a moderate manner, then we can expect the majority of the activists to withdraw from the political scene, leaving a minority either co-opted or radicalised.In short, the further development of these groups would depend on how 'democratic' Hong Kong would be in the future, on which, thinly supported, they can have little influence.

Political apathy and cynicism, a local sociologist sympathetic to democratic reform has noted, is prevalent even in the 'Western domocratic societies' (Leung, 1984: 85-87). However, as Maravall(1982: 86) argues in his study of Spain where democracy is also introduced from above, "while lack of interest and cynicism about politics or feelings of personal lack of influence on political events may be compatible with firmly rooted democratic institutions, they may be a serious weakness for a democracy whose institutions are of recent origin and are fragile." In

Hong Kong, they become a weakness of those who want to put democracy into practice.

In a general sense, we can concur with Scalapino(1953:396-7) that 'timing' is very important for healthy development of democratic institutions and parties. Economic development preceding the establishment of representative government, it seems, would hinder in many ways the development of demands for and/or acceptance of democratic institutions (5). Alternatively, we can argue that the weakness of the groups is rooted in a 'premature development': while the transition of sovereignty has stimulated the growth of the political groups in Hong Kong, no significant sector of the society has yet learned the need for a 'collective solution' of their problems through participation in the central political institutions. Whether the people of Hong Kong can ever learn the need for 'collective solution', however, is a question that cannot be answered in advance. They may, when economic conditions deteriorate. Then, the situation would be very fluid and hard to predict, especially given the fact that the Chinese government's policies towards Hong Kong are caught with contradictory goals.

Notes

(1) For a general discussion of Chinese intellectuals' sense of mission, see Chow(1960:11-15). See also Grieder(1981) & Goldman(1981) for studies of the political roles of modern Chinese intellectuals. See Rieff(1969) and Lipset & Basu(1976) for discussions of the political roles of Western intellectuals.

(2) According to Huntington(1979:9), in the fullest sense,' political generation' should be an age cohort in which members share certain political characteristics and in which they have a consciousness of themselves as a group, but in addition there is an interaction among the members to achieve political results. The political activists in Hong Kong, therefore, form a political generation in the fullest sense of the word. However, as they are but a small section of the cohort, they should be more accurately characterised as a 'generation unit'.See Mannheim(1952) for a discussion of the concept of 'generation unit'.

(3) This is the conclusion reached by Saunders(1979:127-136) after a review of studies of community politics in advanced countries.

(4)Given the lack of clear and firm ideology, we can expect, some of the the groups at least, may behave like the 'personality parties' found in Thailand in its short period of 'party politics', fragile and ephemeral in organisation, even when there is a significant element of direct election in the Legislative Council (See Kramol, 1982).

(5)There can be, of course, different courses of economic development, with different socio-political implications. But experiences from Germany in Nineteenth Century to Latin America today seem to support this line of thought, and that is why 'late-developers' are seldom viable democracies.

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APPENDIX

Profiles of the Interviewees

	Age	Education	Occupation	Group Membership
Mr. A	27	University	Bank Executive	Association for Democracy and People's Livilihood/ Society for Social Research
Mr. B	30	University	Assistant to Legislative Councillor	Association for Democracy and Public Justice
Mr. C	26	University	Researcher	Hong Kong Affairs Society
Mr. D	44	Advanced Degree	Physician/ Teacher in Post-secondary institution	Hong Kong Affairs Society
Mr. E	37	Advanced Degree	Teacher in Post-secondary institution	Hong Kong Observers
Mr. F	37	Advanced Degree	Teacher in Post-secondary Institution	Hong Kong People's Association
Mr. G	28	Advanced Degree	Student	Meeting Point
Mr. H	34	Advanced Degree	Teacher in Post-secondary Institution	Meeting Point
Mr. I	35	Advanced Degree	Teacher in Post-secondary Institution	Meeting Point
Mr. J	27	University	School Teacher	New Hong Kong Society

Mr. K	35	Secondary School	Civil Servant	Progressive Hong Kong Society
Mr. L	27	University	Student	Society for Social Research